

# ADVENTURE!

TALES OF THE  
AEON SOCIETY

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UNDER THE MOON A THRILLING STORY BY WARREN ELLIS





# UNDER THE MOON

**An Aeon Society Adventure**

— transcribed by Warren Ellis from the journals of Whitley Styles, published 1930

Max Mercer landed in the murder pit with a hard crack, the bones of slaughtered dozens snapping under his boots.

On the parapet overlooking the pit, the pale Lord Darkstock stood and stared down, his sickening eyes flashing in the torch-lit gloom. Laughing, he raised his infamous heavy sidearm, the Devastationer. There was blood on its thick muzzle. Mercer's blood. He had struck Mercer from behind with the gun, cowardly filth that he was. Struck from behind as Max tried to free us from the shackles that bound us to the wall. Darkstock could have killed Max right

then, of course — he had no qualms about shooting a good man in the back if it served his poisonous ways. But the crazed English aristocrat had other plans for Max.

Lord Darkstock was a member of a hidden, criminal branch of the British Royal Family heretofore secreted in asylums and institutes for the mentally diseased across the United Kingdom, of whom the King and his immediate, known relatives were, at best, embarrassed and, at worst, terrified by. The Night Royals, they were known as, in the Crown's most secret diaries and manifests.

Max's footing was unsteady. For the first five seconds, I thought this was a reaction to the crack to the brains. And then I realized the floor was moving under him. Sliding away.



A stench of dead things rose.

The floor was slowly winding into the wall, revealing a deeper pit beneath, closed off by thin bars. White bones tumbled off the edge of the floor and clattered on to the bars beneath. The noise roused things in the pit. Bad things.

"We raised them in the dark heart of Africa, Mr. Mercer," came the mad royal's rasp, from 30 feet above. "In the shadow of Forbidden Mountain, where the meteor fell in 1888. There were worms in the meteor, Mr. Mercer. Worms from beyond space. Imagine that!"

Darkstock laughed again as Max scrambled to stay upright. Annabelle and I struggled futilely against our bonds.

"We force-bred them with the royal beasts, our hunting animals. What you see below you is the result. The Bound Horrors of Darkstock Manor!"

Light fell in chilling stages on the things behind bars. Raw, bloody skin. Necks 25 feet long, strong and mobile. Long teeth set in infected mouths, their hard edges slick with pus. Human eyes. From his grim expression, I saw that Max was in no doubt that he could not survive an attack by these beasts. The noise of the bones continuing to clatter onto their bars maddened them. They thrashed and shrieked. And the bars shook in their stone beds.

"Their spittle is corrosive to flesh and fabric. Eventually, you will fall on to the bars, Mr. Mercer, your feet and much of your lower legs rotted away. And then, they will pull you through the bars. In pieces."

Max had less than three yards of floor left.

Max took in the entire scene and calculated.

He drew his boot knife.

He leapt down from the vanishing floor and landed on the bars below.

The Bound Horrors almost brained themselves in lunging at him. The bars shuddered and loosened some more, bending outward a little.

Max picked the largest, strongest Horror by sight as it came up to the bars — and kicked at the bars, right in its face. “Hyah!” He yelled. “Come on!”

The thing smashed into the bars again. They groaned and cracked in their settings. Max reached over and jabbed his knife into the powdering stone, digging away at one bar's foundation.

Max kicked the bars again, right in front of its face. And again. "Come on, dammit! Come on!"

And the Bound Horror, unbound, rammed into the bars with all its strength — and the bars gave way!

Max twisted out of its way and sank his knife into the beast, just below its vile head.

The thing surged 25 feet up into the air. Lord Darkstock recoiled.

Max ripped his knife free of the Horror and launched himself up and away from the thing, toward the pit's parapet and Darkstock, less than five feet distant. In midair, Max snapped his arm down hard, hurling the knife with incredible speed and power—

—and the heavy blade split Lord Darkstock's head in half, dashing his poisonous brains out on the stone floor.

\* \* \*

The spires of New York City shone in the afternoon light.

Max put his booted feet up on my desk and took in the sunshine through the broad windows of the Chrysler Building's top floor. The skyscraper wasn't completed officially, but Max had pull.

"You know what disappoints me most about the world, Whitley?" he said. His voice was soft, thoughtful. I put my pen down on the blotter, arched an eyebrow. "Go on, then," I said. The tone of his voice indicated another onset of that strange sentimentality of his that I always found amusing.

"What disappoints me most is that I had to learn to kill people."

Max was often struck by these black moments. I guess they were the cost of a good man having to do bad things.

"And that I take satisfaction in it. There has to be a better way to deal with filth like Darkstock than putting six inches of steel in his brain. I mean, imagine what he knew. All lost now."

Max was, by nature, a philanthropist.



He'd made a sheik's fortune 11 or 12 times over in his young life from radical new mechanical patents and stock market wizardry and, each time, had given it away — wholly or in increments — to charities, trusts and reform societies. His concern was always with making life better for as many people as was humanly possible. That, and his violent aversions to both boredom and thought of his own personal safety, was what tended to make his life most difficult.

"You said it yourself, Max," I yawned, stretching. "'Filth.' Some things simply have no right to live. Or they abrogate their right to live by their behavior."

"Surely you don't believe that, Whitley," Max said, eyeing me carefully. I hated it when Max looked at me like that. It was like he could see right through into the guts of me. I've seen cheap gunsels and kings alike shrink and keen like whipped dogs under that gaze.

"I surely do, sir. Bad things should happen to bad people, and that's the beginning and the end of it."

"Hm." Max rose, walked over to the window, looked out on sprawled Manhattan below from this, the tallest building on Earth. A God's-eye view of the world's greatest city.

"Bad things happening to bad people. If only that were the way of it, Whit, my boy. If only that were the way of it."

Max paused for a moment, in thought. A pause concluded by an intake of breath so sharp that it made me snap into alertness. Nothing — *nothing* — had surprised Maxwell Anderson Mercer in all the time I had known him. That awesome calculating mind that rendered the world a mathematical sphere of possibilities and options meant that he was ready for anything and expected it all — that and his strange sense of other times that I privately termed his "chronal awareness." You could sneak up on him while he was otherwise engaged or physically impaired — as had happened in Darkstock Manor — but when he had his wits about him, it was almost impossible to shock him, I had believed. Whatever he'd seen, he wasn't remotely prepared for. I dashed to the window and

followed his gaze.

Another of the new skyscrapers, two blocks south of the Chrysler Building, was lifting free of its foundations.

The sidewalk around it was cracking apart. Water pipes burst open and fired chilly geysers up through the broken gray flagstones. The building was visibly rising. With an appalling shriek of twisting steel, the immense skyscraper pulled free of the Earth. And continued to rise. Office workers scrambled from the building's main entrances, dropping toward the ground — but, within moments, such panicked escape was certain death. People dived from the upper stories anyway. Max and I could hear their screams even from this distance, for they were jumping in their dozens. The street below was awash with gore. The plucked skyscraper continued to ascend.

A little later, there was a light rain of windowglass. The building was gone, disappeared into the upper reaches of the sky.

"Call the Aeon Society," whispered Max.

\*\*\*

Professor Benjamin Franklin Dixon blinked in the daylight, deeply uncomfortable.

"It's only sunshine, Frank," I smiled. He paled and shuddered.

"I do my best work in the lab, Whitley," he muttered. He only ever muttered, at best, and most people suspected he'd shatter if he actually raised his voice. "I can't help it. I don't like it out here." He lit another of his thick black cigars, unique to him and rolled by his own personal staff of insane shamen and priestesses somewhere in the depths of Cuba, and considered the scene.

The gaping wound in the New York block where the skyscraper once stood had not yet been dressed, at Max's request. The scene needed to be preserved as it was when the event took place. He watched, sadly, as policemen with hoses rinsed the remains of the doomed office workers off the street and into the gutters.

"Franklin," he said. "Begin your analysis."

Frank Dixon turned to his array of detection machinery, which filled a steel



trailer hooked behind the beaten, unpainted car parked beside them; a large pile of strange metal things with no obvious function. He lifted out three fat spider-like devices wrought from black steel, each trailing long cables. Dixon screwed the free ends of the cables into the side of a metal box the size of a dresser, studded with dials and crowned with a view-screen. He threw a lever mounted on the box's top, and the thing began to rattle and shudder. Red "eyes" lit up on the steel spiders, and their legs started an alarming fidget, sharp ends tap-tap-tapping on the sidewalk.

"Detectoids," Dixon muttered, as if that explained everything.

He screwed a large, radio announcer's microphone into a free port next to the detectoids' connectors, took it by its stand and backed over to Max and me. "I finally cracked the voice-recognition system," he said. "If I speak clearly and loudly, they understand and obey." Max couldn't help but smile.

"Begin analysis procedure," Dixon muttered into the microphone. "Open all detection devices. Proceed into event area."

The detectoids hesitated for a moment, making small angry hops, and then scuttled into the gaping pit left by the stolen skyscraper. Dixon watched the dials on the big control box. "They're fitted with every kind of detection apparatus I could think of. If there's any trace of whatever caused this singular event, they'll find it, boys."

The detectoids spidered their way into the pit. Dixon watched his dials obsessively, looking for the invisible clues that had to be present — radiations, fields, intangible residues from whatever process there could exist that might pull a skyscraper out of the ground and fling it into space—

The needle of a center dial jerked into life and then whipped across its arc to bury itself in the red.

"Z-rays," Dixon hissed.

\* \* \*

Z-rays! The mysterious energy emissions that, when harnessed, could confound the laws of physics themselves. Whatever yanked this building clean out

of its roots and threw it into space was powered by Z-rays.

In the basement of Dixon's laboratory, the troubled professor scrawled glowing diagrams and equations on his massive light-board, a small incandescent valve taking the place that chalk would have with an ordinary blackboard. His voice was practically a whisper, low and urgent, as he explained what his detectoids had uncovered.

"Z-rays are an almost perfect power source. They appear to be unlimited in supply, a small quanta of them do a massive amount of work, and they are essentially 'clean.' Except for one thing. They leave trace radiation, and they eject heat. So you can see where they've been, and you can see where they've come from. Just look for the radiation on impact and follow the heat trail back."

Max glowered over steepled fingers, leaning forward in the heavy wooden chair provided. "Where does the trail lead, Franklin?" Max was focusing, becoming powerfully intent on the job at hand.

Dixon turned, blinked. "Into outer space, Max. Into space, traveling an arc."

I couldn't help but laugh. "Spending all your time down here in the dark has sent you batty, Prof. Your brain's finally gone funny. I always said it would. Why would the man in the moon suck skyscrapers out of New York City?"

Dixon looked at me as if I'd been dropped on the head repeatedly as a baby.

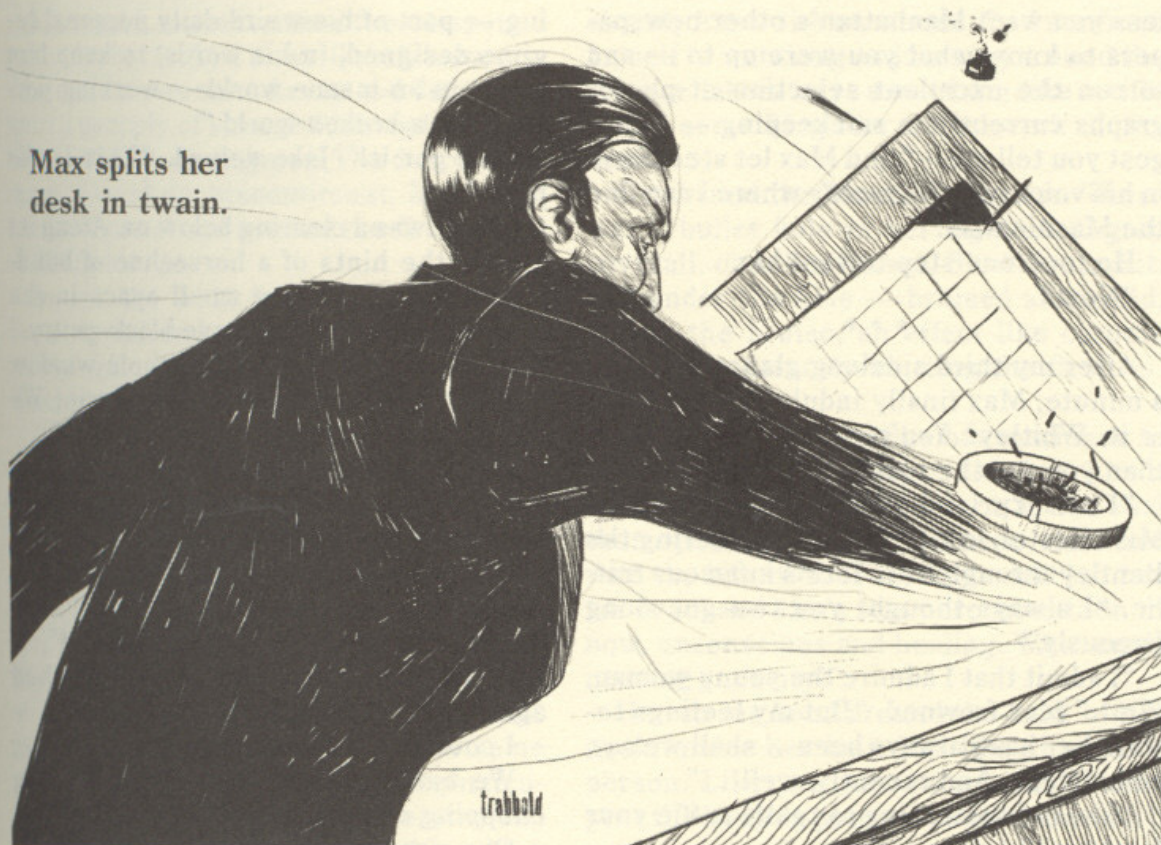
"New York City has been attacked by an anti-gravity ray, Whitley. The ray-projector would be mounted on an *artificial* moon in low Earth orbit. It projected the beam onto Manhattan while it tracked over us. It only took one building because it cannot stay still — to maintain orbit it must continue revolving around the planet at a steady speed. And, personally, I think it took the wrong building."

"Explain," Max snapped. His marvelous mind was gearing up to its intense full speed.

"Following the arc and the relative position of the missing building, Max — I think they were aiming at the Chrysler Building and missed. This was probably



Max splits her desk in twain.



the inaugural orbital firing of the projector, after all."

"They," said Max. "Who are 'they'?"

"I don't think there can be any doubt," Dixon muttered, turning back to the light-board.

\*\*\*

"You're looking for the Machinatrix? Darling, I thought it was me you loved." Sarah Gettel, ice-blue eyes under a coal black bob of perfectly glossy hair, never learned how to wound with a word. She only ever took the kill shots.

Max eyed the world-famous journalist sourly. "Sarah, I don't even *like* you. But you travel in shady enough circles in search of your 'scoops' that I know you know where she is. And I don't have time to play games."

Sarah laughed, playing to the audience gathered outside the broad windows of her personal office at *The Daily Signal*, the Manhattan paper that her reportage alone had made great. "What're you going to do, Max? Hold me down and beat it out of me? Silly boy."

Max turned to her great oaken desk, placed his palms on it. He gave her his trademark grin. "I had considered it, to be honest. There is very little time and I do not intend to see more people dead because I did not or could not act to prevent it." His eyes studied the desktop, and in that moment I knew what he was looking for. The line of the grain, the strength of the wood — the point of weakness. "Do you understand, Sarah?" he asked.

And split the desk in two with one lightning punch.

Sarah stared at the wreckage, uncharacteristically at a loss for words.

"Death offends me, and if there is any way I can stop it, I will. Still," Max smiled the same warm smile, "people dying in ones and twos in order to save hundreds and thousands, I can cope with." Whether or not he was bluffing, he had Sarah hanging on his every word.

Max brushed sawdust from his fist. "More to the point, Sarah: I know what you were doing in Russia last summer. And I know who you were doing it with. So, un-







Max and I trotted across the compound toward what looked to us like a laboratory. The main doors were heavy and decorated with a panoply of strange-looking locks. All of which were disengaged. The doors stood open. Struck by presentiment, Max drew his Hell-pistol and twisted the fire control to Wide-Range.

Inside the main lab, under walls encrusted with technology so advanced as to seem alien, under blue light, the Machinatrix lay in a pool of blood.

"Get the television camera, Jake," said Max, quietly. "Tell Franklin his ex-wife's been attacked."

\* \* \*

Dr. Hephaestia Geary-Wexler had undergone a short, passionate, intense and violent marriage to Benjamin Franklin Dixon, which ended explosively with them both wishing virulent death on each other. Two genius-level engineers under the same roof was never going to work — particularly when Franklin was an obsessive and Hephaestia had questionable ethics. Max had known them both through the late Dr. Hammersmith and didn't take sides during the inevitable dissolution. Hephaestia did that for everyone, by leaving. She involved herself in a number of esoteric scientific pursuits in the years that followed. Yet only now, seeing her lying before us, did I realize just how far afield she'd gone. The respected Dr. Hephaestia Geary-Wexler was also the Machinatrix, a mysterious underworld figure who sold her inventor's gift to the highest bidder.

It appeared that, this time, someone had paid her in bullets.

Max was down on one knee by her, examining her. Very still, opening his senses, taking in everything about the scene.

"The scent is wrong," he said, quietly. He touched a finger to the thin pool of blood around her prone form. Paused, taking in the sensation of the liquid on his skin, nerves exquisitely sensitive.

"There's oil in her blood," he whispered. "And the blood is old. There's some chemical in it, keeping it fluid when it should have crusted."

I wondered but did not speak. Questions would only hamper Max's detection. He

already knew the questions. So I confined myself to watching and looking around the strange laboratory: something like a rifle there, something like a clockwork fetus here....

He turned the Machinatrix over. There was a bullet hole in her tight steel-gray coverall, over her breast. Blood around it. But under the hole — bruised skin. And, within the bruise, an effect like chrome cobweb, apparently knitting the flesh together.

"My God, Whitley. She has machines in her that will heal injuries! And she's adapted her own blood to act as the fuel that operates them. Someone shot her with the intention of execution and left her for dead, and she's lain here from then to now, unconscious and healing. What engineering audacity!"

He ran his hand around the back of her neck, under her hair. Not like she was a person. Like she was a machine. "I suspect the healing process required for such a major wound may have left her without enough energy to return to consciousness. I suspect application of kinesis to her chakra structure may boost her into waking."

I saw Max' hand flex, under her hair — as if he were flipping a switch. And the Machinatrix's eyes snapped open. Frozen, for a moment. And then swiveled around. Her mouth curled into an ugly grin.

"Max Mercer. I'm in Hell, then."

"Nice to see you too," said Max, sitting back and smiling openly. "What's the story?"

The Machinatrix looked down at her bullet wound — and then sharply across at Max.

"I'm not giving you the secret, Max."

"I could have ransacked the place and stolen it and two dozen other pending patents while you were laying on the floor in a pool of your own engine oil trying to work up the bio-energy to lift your little finger. If I wanted it, I'd have it. But what I need is in your head."

Jake appeared, lugging the television system.

"Don't look at him, look at me," Max snapped when Hephaestia's attention wan-







engines strain to keep us all in the air. Also in the back was Hephaestia's Z-ray-powered rifle and our "aiming system." Our "aiming system" was drinking whiskey that had probably been made in an old man's bathtub. And not a clean old man, either.

"Are you ready, Whitley?" Max grinned.

"No," I said. I was not grinning.

"Out we go," said Max, dragging me out of the open door in the side of the *Hawk* and into nothing but thin air.

All of a sudden, there was 5,000 feet of nothing between my feet and the hard rock of Rex Mundi. And the distance was shrinking fast. Max was laughing out loud as we plummeted at 100 miles an hour, loving every second. I could see the command-and-control complex below us. I could pick out details on the central building's flat roof. I could pick out the exact spot where I would, within 30 seconds, turn into a wide red puddle.

Max reached toward me and yanked the cord on the pack he'd strapped to me back in the plane. I snapped up 100 feet in a fraction of a second as the Max Mercer Super-Chute shot away and blossomed open with a dull *whump*. The chute's angled wings took over, small rocket-tips at the ends of the burn-proof spans of fiber firing occasionally to bring us in on target.

We touched down in the center of the compound at walking speed. Hitting the quick release button on our harnesses, we shed the Super-Chutes and drew Hell-pistols. No time to muck around. We had no idea what to expect, and maximum force was our only insurance.

Above the central complex, a tower rose, 200 feet tall — a spidery framework filled with the weird machinery of a massive teluric generator.

Max looked up. "This is how he does it, Whitley. As the moon passes over this location, the tower beams enough power up to it to last until its next pass. If we can take this out, the thing will eventually run out of power and fall back to Earth, burning up in the atmosphere."

Max kicked open the door to the command-and-control complex.

It was empty. Abandoned. There were cold cups of coffee and curling sandwiches on the tables and work counters. A huge, electrically lighted map of the world dominated the room over a counter with great consoles full of unknowable equipment and dials subordinate to it. An eccentric dotted line tracked across the Mercator projection of the Earth.

A pulsing circle surrounded a tiny equatorial point in the Pacific Ocean. A glowing triangle followed the dotted track around the world. The triangle was extremely close to the circle.

The counter clicked constantly.

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"Max..." I started.

"I see it. Someone tipped him off. He's aimed the damn thing at this island. The power will beam up to the artificial moon, and the moon's gravity-cutting projector will fire down at the island... and we all know what happens next." Max unshipped his radio from his belt. "Jake, can you hear me? The gravity projector's going to rip Rex Mundi out of the ocean and throw it into space in 25 seconds unless we can kill the Z-ray engine."

"No time to get us off the island," I pointed out. Sounding calmer than I was.

Max ran outside. I followed. Looking up, we could see the *Steel Hawk* glinting in the sunlight. Too far away.

The air began to glow. I could still hear the ticking of the counter, even from out here. I saw pebbles on the ground at my feet begin to rise. Somewhere, a door was banging. We were trapped on an island that was about to be fired into orbit.

And then I heard something yell "YAHOO!"

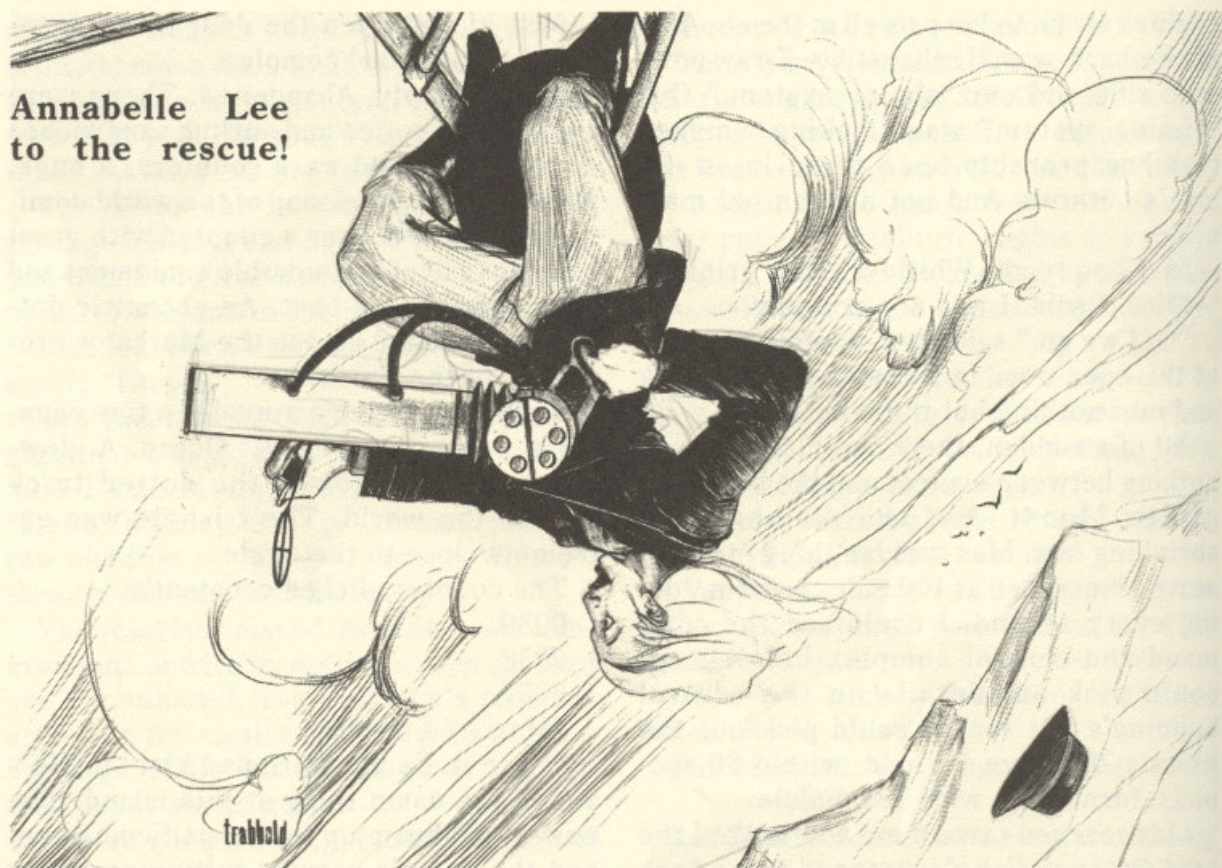
I stared. And couldn't do much more than mutter: "Oh... my... God."

Max smiled. "Our aiming system."

The *Hawk's* undercarriage was down. Hanging upside down from the undercarriage, legs wrapped around a wheel strut,



## Annabelle Lee to the rescue!



hefting the Z-ray rifle and hooting and hollering: Annabelle Lee Newfield. The single best shot on Earth. Pretty as a picture, mad as a hatter, and, right now, all that stood between Max and me living and Max and me dying in a vacuum.

The *Hawk* began to buck and judder as it entered the moon projector's growing field of influence. I could feel the island straining against its geologic underpinnings. I could feel it start to tear free of the Earth.

Annabelle Lee narrowed her eyes, twisted her hands around the rifle, took a breath — held it —

— fired —

— an eye-stinging beam of light boiling out of the rifle muzzle, cutting a wound in

the air as it blazed from rifle to tower —

— which went up in flames as Annabelle Lee's shot perfectly cored the massive Z-Ray engine within.

Rex Mundi shuddered and groaned and rested. Max and I fell a little way, not realizing that we too had lifted a full 12 inches into the air.

The *Hawk* overshot us, and we heard Annabelle Lee's mad laughter pealing.

We were alive. But we knew nothing of our new enemy; only that he was still at large after killing hundreds. Max glared up at the bright sky.

"Bad things happening to bad people. If only that were the way of it, Whitley. If only that were the way of it."



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erate it. You need charts of the land and tools to measure what the air is doing. A successful solo flight works because of a great many people, most of whom you'll never know, all doing their part at each step along the way. Well, setting a society's worth of people free to master their destiny is much like that. To choose for themselves, they need to know what's happened in the past, what the world is like now and how to evaluate all that and make wise decisions for the future.

One way of thinking about what we do in the Aeon Society is this: We're mapmakers for tomorrow's free fliers. We dedicate ourselves to charting the world as it is right now, in all the places people don't otherwise think to look. We head into jungles and war zones, haunted sewers and empty deserts, wherever there are mysteries to explore, and we bring back the stories of what we find. In our files, there's the raw material people will need to make the next decade, the next century, the next thousand years the best it can be.

Along the way, we deal with some of the people who want to chain the rest of us, cut the wings, yoke us up. Some of us here relish a

good scrap, and some of us don't find it all that much fun but are pretty good at it anyway. It's an adventure in its own way, even if fighting would-be villains is more like preventative maintenance rather than curing a disease or breaking open new territory. It's necessary, too.

We're not the only ones out there doing this kind of work, you realize. Talk to Whitley, and he'll be glad to tell you more than you ever wanted to know about our friends and rivals; he knows the files probably better than I know the backs of my own hands. I don't mean to suggest that you have to join us or that have no chance of helping the world in any other way. I *do* say that we do more good work, more thoroughly, than anyone else I know of and that we do so in large measure because we're more flexible about who we take in. You met Enkidu this morning. He and his people are as much a part of the future we're making as the rest of us.

I want you to join us, too. While you think it over, let's look around. Let me show you what you'd be getting into. I'm confident that, when you see it all, you'll make the right decision.





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DUST OF DEATH!  
A THRILLING STORY  
BY GREG STOLZE





# DUST OF DEATH!

## An Aeon Society Adventure

—transcribed by Greg Stolze from the journals of Whitley Styles, published 1924

The sprawl of dead men made me uncomfortable. It brought back memories.

My eyes were immediately drawn to their blue lips, hands clutching throats as if to somehow draw forth breath. They'd smothered, clearly. The question was... how?

I knelt and reached out to close a dead man's eyes, but Primoris stopped me.

"Leave them, Styles," he said. "Leave them just as they died."

"But common decency, man!"

"Any detail might be a clue — even the position of their eyes. I suspect these men would prefer us to find their killers, innocent or not. That is, assuming they're in a condition to 'prefer' anything."

I was silent a moment, looking around the laboratory. Primoris and Dixon could probably read the tangle of tubes and pipes and flasks like a book, but it was Greek to me. For a moment, I let myself wonder why I'd been sent. But I knew. For a scientific mystery, Mercer sent his great minds. For a puzzling asphyxiation, he sent me.

"They were smothered," I told Primoris, just to say something. He'd know, of course. That restless mind of his had surely fallen on every detail like a hawk on a hare, tearing it apart to suck out every last bit of information.

As expected, he nodded impatiently. "A magnificent deduction," he said sarcastically. "But now, can you tell me the color of the sky?"

"Smothered," I repeated, gritting my teeth, "but not strangled. There are no marks on the throat. A skilled assassin

could strangle without a mark, but someone that talented would attack the jugular to starve the brain of oxygen. It's a fast kill. These men died much slower. You can see it in the posture and in the blue lips. Something was keeping air out of their lungs altogether."

Primoris raised his eyebrows. "Yet how could one attacker — or even a number — perform this hypothetical 'slow kill' on several would-be drug purveyors without disturbing the lab? Other than spilling a quantity of yellow dust on the floor, that is."

"What do you mean 'would-be drug purveyors'?"

He gestured at the extensive lab equipment. "They were trying to make artificial opium," he said. "Isn't that right, Professor?"

"Sorry?" Dixon looked up from the yellow smudge on the floor. He had put a small sample in a petri dish and was gingerly dripping something on it from an eyedropper. He frowned at the result.

"The dead men, Professor. They were trying to synthesize opium?"

He glanced around, shrugged. "Looks like it."

"Is such a thing even possible?" I asked.

"Oh certainly," Primoris said. "I expect someone will make artificial opium within 10 years. Fifteen, if they're lazy."

"But... that's monstrous! If a criminal could simply make opium in a basement lab instead of importing it or growing it...."

Primoris nodded, a sardonic smile creasing his lips. "I suspect I now know why these men were killed. But the question of how remains."

"God's wounds!" Dixon muttered. "Have a look at this, Primoris." He'd pre-



pared a slide of the yellow substance and was examining it under a microscope — seemingly oblivious to the dead scientist slumped next to him. Primoris bent to look and made a small, surprised sound in the back of his throat.

It was the first time I'd ever heard him surprised.

"We'll have to get this back to my lab for a proper analysis," Dixon said, but at that moment something caught my eye. The door to the lab was creeping open, and six men were creeping in. Short, swarthy men who looked uncomfortable in their cheap suits.

"Doc, Professor, we have—" I didn't have a chance to say "trouble" before all six had produced strange knives of midnight blue metal. I saw the late afternoon light glint off glass sheathes before the blades came out — not drawn, but cracked free, flicked hard against a doorjamb or countertop.

They held them competently but not expertly. I didn't expect six to be enough until thick yellow smoke began to pour off the blades, collecting in a small cloud near their ankles. I'd never seen such a thing, and I didn't like it, so I drew my guns just as they lunged forward. I still wasn't nervous; Primoris and I could probably take four of them unarmed, if it came to that, and heaven only knew what Dixon had on him. I almost felt sorry for the first attacker as I aimed at his heart and pulled my right-hand trigger.

The bullet clicked on a dud, and I heard the same when I tried with the left. I dodged a wild swipe and felt a strange breeze drawing toward the foreigners. I drew a breath to warn the others when it felt like a black tunnel was closing around me. Suddenly dizzy and weak, I fell to my knees, just as a knife wreathed in yellow smoke slashed across my face....

\* \* \*

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was a lovely visage wreathed in blonde curls. I blinked, and before my mind could get up to speed, my mouth had opened. The words "Oh, bugger," fell out, followed immediately by, "I died and this is heaven, isn't it?"

The blonde woman's cackle brought me back to earth. That and her immediate use of a spittoon. No culture I know believes angels chew tobacco.

"Oh, Whitley," she said. "How you do go on!"

As my head and vision cleared, the afterlife hypothesis became increasingly remote. First and foremost, I was in pain. It felt like my entire head from the ears up had been boiled. Tentatively, I rolled my eyes. It hurt neither more nor less. Not a hangover, then. This was more a full-head, throbbing pain — exactly the sort of pain one gets after being choked unconscious. But there was more to it than that.... In my forehead, a complex amalgam of pains played counterpoint to the dull throb. There was the icy ache of a fresh, shallow cut, but underneath that was a peculiar burning pain, much like an overexerted muscle.

"I'm surprised to see you at my bedside," I said to Annabelle (for the blonde woman was none other than my comrade Annabelle Lee Newfield). Then I winced as I realized the impropriety of what I'd said. The wince provided a new pain — a tugging tightness across my brow. Stitched, it felt like.

"Er, what I mean is, I thought you'd be out hunting down my would-be assassins."

"Oh, they've been captured. Dixon used one of his doohickies on them... a 'glueotron' or 'gluematic' or something like that. Last time I saw them, they were just starting to get them separated." She leaned in and gave me a wink. "When he makes his joke about 'hardened criminals,' be sure to laugh because he probably saved you and Primoris both."

"Really?" I blurted. "Primoris too? I should have thought...."

"Here, look at this." Annabelle reached into a drawer next to my bed — I now recognized a familiar suite at the Emily Mercer Memorial Clinic — and produced a glass jar. Inside were several thin, red objects. They looked like rusty wires, perhaps 40 gauge.

"What's that, then?"

"Your blood. When that knife cut you, it somehow made your blood turn into...



this. They pulled these out of the veins in your forehead. Lucky for you the blood vessels up there are small. Primoris was stabbed deep in the side, and a lot more of his blood got... converted."

Cautiously, I sat up. Not too bad. "Is he all right?"

"He's still in surgery. I couldn't quite follow all that they were saying, but Dixon and Tallon were concerned that a piece of... solid blood... might block a valve and cause a heart attack. That or get propelled into his brain and cause a stroke."

I slid my legs toward the edge of the bed, then stopped when I realized I was wearing nothing but a hospital gown. "If you'll excuse me," I said, "I think I'd like to put on my pants and have a talk with our attackers."

"You can join Mercer in that, when the police finish up. Hurry though. *His* pants are already on."

\* \* \*

As I was leaving the clinic, a flawlessly clean Bentley pulled up. A door opened, an aroma of cigars and leather wafted out, and Dixon's voice floated up. "Need a ride?"

"Thanks, Prof." I got in, then jumped in alarm as padded leather clamps hugged my chest and thighs.

"A safety feature," he said. "I should have mentioned."

I wondered what other "features" he'd added to Max's treasured auto but kept my questions to myself. "When I said thanks, I meant for more than just the ride. Thanks for saving my life."

"Ah, well, that. I'm sure I can count on you to 'pick up the next round,' as it were. Besides, I really was looking for a chance to test the Dynamic Gluten Ejaculator."

"The what?"

"A glue gun I'd been toying with." A smile played around the corner of his mouth. "We wound up with..."

"...let me guess. Six hardened criminals?"

He frowned, disappointed. "Four. Primoris killed two before they got him. I guess they didn't consider me as much of a threat."

"Turnabout's fair play. I didn't think *they*

were much of a threat. They handled themselves well, but without those knives...."

"Ah, well, the technological advantage!" He clucked his tongue softly. "Science is ever an unpredictable mistress. Not unlike—"

"Do you know what was going on with that smoke?" I interjected, not wanting to hear the tribulations of his unusual romantic life.

"Not smoke, my friend; *dust*. The knives produced the same dust that was on the floor of the lab."

"What was it?"

"The dust is an oxide — the byproduct of a chemical reaction, like ash or, yes, smoke. This particular reaction is extremely dramatic and dynamic. Whatever those knives were made of, it sucks in vast quantities of oxygen and traps it in an oxide."

"You mean those knives drew all the air out of the room?"

"Not the air, no. Just the part of it we need to live. Tell me, does your forehead feel overexerted? Like you've been lifting weights with your eyebrows?"

"How'd you know?"

"Lactic acid, my friend. Our muscles produce it when they become oxygen-starved."

"So when the knife cut me...?"

"It reacted with the oxygen in your blood. Nasty, nasty stuff."

"Is that why my guns misfired?"

He nodded. "No oxygen meant the gunpowder couldn't ignite."

"What are those knives made of, then?"

"Well, that's the interesting thing. Such prodigious rates of oxidation are quite simply unheard-of. Whatever it is, it's a compound or element unknown to man."

\* \* \*

The swarthy assassin sat, one hand cuffed to a wooden chair. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth, and one eye was swollen shut. Seeing the direction of my gaze, Sergeant Murtry narrowed his eyes and said "He fell."

"Chicago jails have such slippery floors," Mercer replied. He said nothing more, but he fixed the officer with his steely gaze, and the hulking cop flushed and turned away.





"Good luck getting anything out of him," Murtry said as he departed. "He h'ain't said naught."

We entered the room. The man looked up, dully.

"Cat got your tongue?" Mercer asked.

"Perhaps the testicle-crushing machine will loosen his lips," I said — in Arabic. The prisoner's eyes only flicked to me for a moment, but I knew he'd understood. Mercer nodded.

"You speak no English?" he asked, also in Arabic. We got no reply.

"He's from Bahrain, unless I miss my guess," I said, switching back to English.

Mercer slapped himself on the forehead. "Of course. If you have a weapon that steals oxygen, whom do you pick to wield it? Someone trained from childhood to hold his breath. Someone like a Bahrain pearl diver."

For the first time, the captive broke his silence.

"Are you Max Mercer?" he asked.

"I am," Max replied.

The diver nodded gravely. Then he lunged to his feet, grabbing the chair arm with both hands and swinging it at Maxwell's head.

He was fast — a lifetime spent moving through water makes one speedy in the thinner air. But Max was more than ready for him. He moved according to his own notions of fighting science, picking an angle perpendicular to the arc of the makeshift club, applying just the right pressure to swing the man off balance. With a crash, the fellow slammed to the floor, his wrist pinned beneath the chair he'd tried, so clumsily, to use as a weapon.

Max placed his thumb on a nerve joint at the corner of the Bahraini's jaw and held him down.

"What would make a man travel across the world, only to risk his life so foolishly?" Mercer asked.

A tear leaked from the diver's eye.

"They have my daughter," he whispered.



Dear Sir,

You are cordially invited to a scientific exhibition of the greatest importance. I do not exaggerate when I say that this discovery could potentially change the world forever. Nor am I trying to flatter you when I say that you are in a position to help make those changes a reality.

Please attend the demonstration of my Telluric Engine at my laboratory in West London on 21 July 1922 and discuss the implications of this grand discovery.

If you are conversant with current developments in the physical sciences, you will have read or heard of the theory that the vacuum itself has energy to it... that there is energy even in nothingness! If you are not, consider that even nothingness has characteristics that define it: length, width, breadth, time. If energy is bound up in the physical dimensions of matter, as Einstein so brilliantly showed, then it stands to reason that energy is also bound up in the physical dimensions of space-time itself. If energy can deform space and time, as Einstein's general theory of relativity postulates, then space and time can store energy. Quite simple once you get over the apparent nonsense involved in the idea that in nothing there is something.

This energy of nothingness I call telluric energy. Literally, "energy of the Earth," although it, in truth, goes far beyond Earth itself: a sort of cosmic background energy that permeates all existence, much as we once thought the aether did. My Telluric Engine draws, or will draw, upon this seemingly limitless source of power! My experiments to date show that any attempt to remove this telluric energy results in more energy rushing in from all sides to maintain the integrity of reality. And since the universe is unimaginably vast, so is the supply of energy that may be obtained in this way.

So please, attend my demonstration. As you no doubt can already conceive, this has implications far beyond the advancement of science. A new tomorrow beckons, and I would wish for you to help greet it!

Doctor Sir Galvin Hammersmith

Atlas Cross

Bushy Park

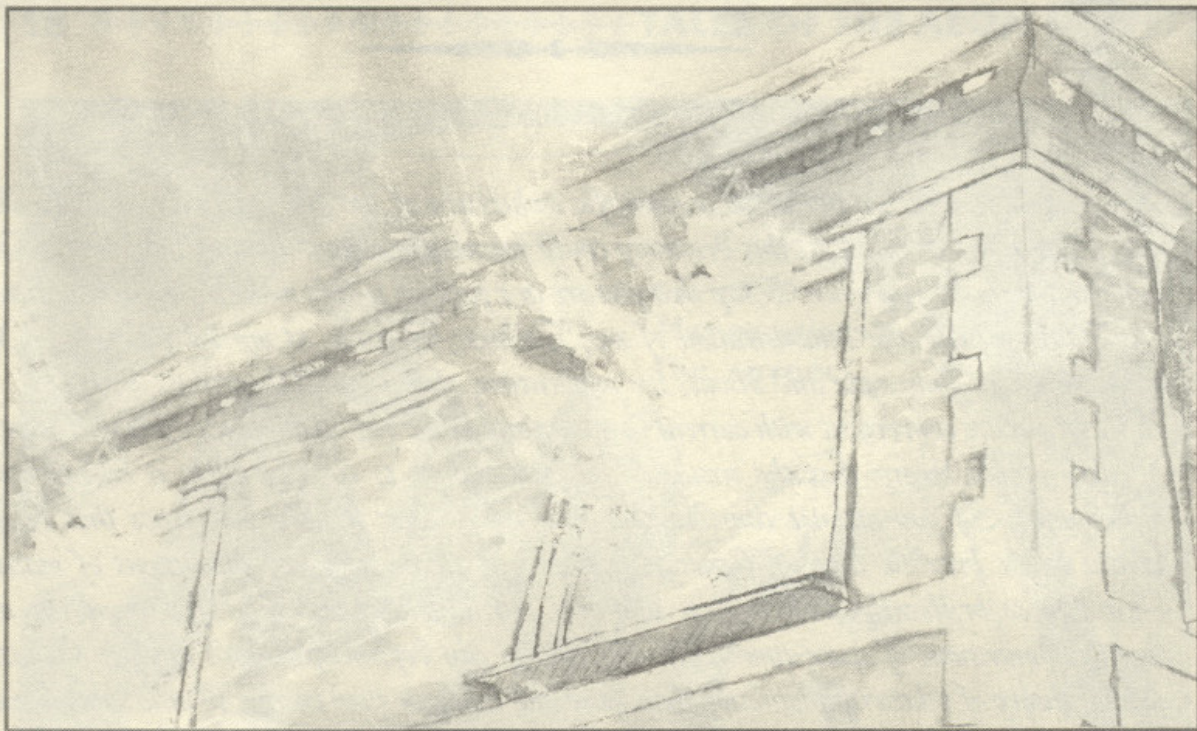
London

1 May 1922

Why me? What brought me there to witness that magnificent, tragic spectacle of fire and lightning from room-filling machinery run amok, the devastation to the estate, Dr. Hammersmith's heroic self-sacrifice to save the rest of us, those dazed moments on the greens as each of us felt fresh stirrings of power?

Destiny.





— excerpt from *The Times*, 22 July 1922

## FIRE SEVERELY DAMAGES WEST END MANOR

Death Toll Unknown; Famous Inventor Lost

One of the most distinguished members of London's scientific community, albeit one of its most eccentric, is no more. Dr. Sir Calvin Hammersmith perished in a fire at his Bushy Park home late last night. He was in the process of demonstrating a new scientific apparatus to the sort of cosmopolitan, eclectic audience so familiar to those granted the opportunity to participate in his salons. This time, however, something went tragically wrong.

American scientist Professor Benjamin Franklin Dixon, onetime assistant of Dr. Hammersmith and known to many in this city for his own scientific demonstrations, gave us this account, refined for public presentation by your reporter.

"After a short introductory lecture, Dr. Hammersmith turned on his 'telluric energy' accumulators. As his special battery apparatus charged, he demonstrated a variety of measuring tools, to chart the movements of what he hoped would be a revolutionary new power source. The moment the batteries reached full capacity, well..."

At this juncture, Prof. Dixon became understandably moved. He valiantly gathered himself after a moment and continued: "Unfortunately, the device exploded. Perhaps it was the

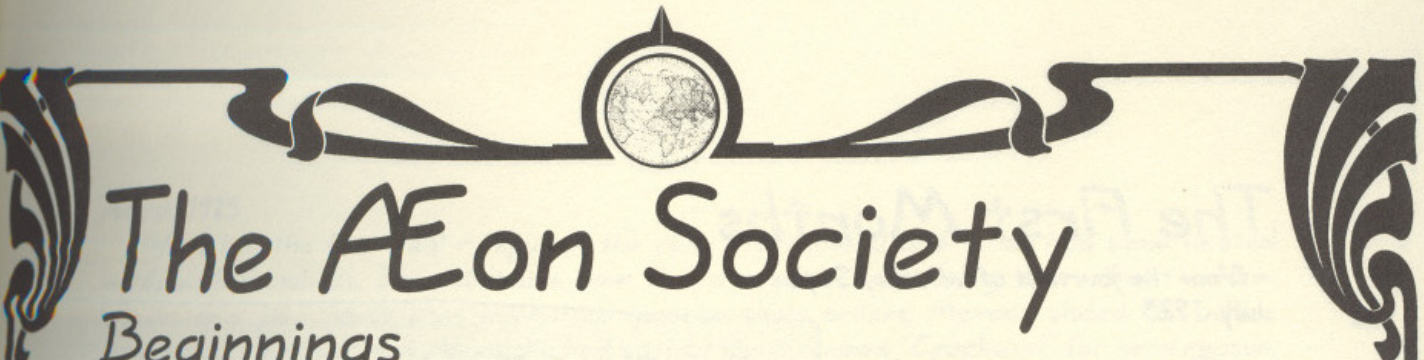
capacitors or the batteries; we may never know. Fire swept through the lab in seconds and spread to the rest of the manor in mere minutes. Curiously, a peculiar ripple effect created a pocket of calm in which some of us sheltered, but those so unfortunate as to stand outside were incinerated instantly.

"Dr. Hammersmith stayed by his machines, desperately attempting to activate dampers or other safety measures. I must make it clear that at no point was there anything foolish or careless in his demonstration. Indeed, he showed profound courage. His self-sacrifice did, in fact, save us, as in his final minutes some compensatory system damped down the fire for just long enough to let those of us in the calm pocket flee outside. He turned to join us, but a second surge burst over him. He died on the spot.

"I and the other survivors mourn his passing and regret also the loss of the unique scientific insights that he had not yet shared with the rest of the world."

It is unclear at present how many attendees perished in the tragedy. Thankfully, none of the survivors were seriously injured. Examination in local hospitals showed no major burns or other damage, and individuals suffering from smoke inhalation and the like were treated and released this morning.





# The Æon Society

## Beginnings

— from the journals of Whitley Styles  
December, 1922

Donighal has called. He asked if I had heard from Maxwell Mercer, since the events at Hammersmith. I haven't heard from Max since just before the two of them left for London, *and I told him this. He said that Maxwell has been missing since right after the event, and no one has heard from him at all. I've promised to be on the next boat to London, to look into this disappearance myself. Mrs. Austin will be disappointed, but her jewels can wait.*

January, 1923

He's gone, without a trace. I've tracked every false hope, wild goose and red herring in England *and have come no closer to finding Maxwell Mercer. It is as if the man has disappeared into thin air. Apparently, no one has seen or talked to him since the Hammersmith Affair. Donighal cabled me from the Far East, saying he's had no luck and not to waste my time. I've booked passage on a fast liner back to America for tomorrow. Perhaps Mercer's returned there. I'm a little worried — Mercer's a tough one, but this is truly unusual, even for him.*

March, 1923

I've given up the search, though reluctantly. Months have passed, and I'm no closer to finding Mercer. I haven't heard from Donighal in weeks, and the last telegram makes me think he's giving up as well. I can't keep looking, for other matters require my attention, such as Mrs. Austin's jewels. I'll just have to keep hoping Max will turn up.

June, 1923

Max is back. Let me write that again — Maxwell Mercer is back. I can't think of anyone else who could have so completely hidden from me for months and then popped up right under my nose in Chicago. He's been in the care of Dr. Primoris for the last few months, but he can't remember how or why he ended up there. Amnesia says the Doctor. I'm not sure, but I think Mercer might have introduced Primoris to me, back when he rescued me from the Thuggee. The Doctor seems familiar, at least, and has apparently known Mercer for years.

We're going out for steak tonight, to celebrate the sudden return. Max says he's had some time to think and wants me to consider joining him on a new venture. I'm looking forward to hearing this. It's good to have my friend back.

— excerpt from *The Chicago Times*, July 19th, 1923

## NEW CLUB TO OPEN DOORS

### Æon Society for Gentlemen Promises Big Things

CHICAGO — Noted philanthropist and adventurer Maxwell Anderson Mercer announced yesterday that he was opening a new gentleman's club, the Æon Society for Gentlemen, here in Chicago. "We are looking for people of an adventurous nature who are interested in exploring the new worlds around us," Mercer said.

Maxwell Mercer has been instrumental in funding and leading expeditions into the darkest parts of Africa and South America.



# The First Months

— from the journals of Whitley Styles  
July, 1923

That was some steak dinner. Max seemed on fire, more so than usual. Whatever happened to cause his amnesia, it certainly did no harm to his mind. I don't think I was half-way through my steak before he spilled the beans. His grand scheme: gather a group of brave, intelligent and open-minded people who, together, will explore the world. "Not necessarily the best at what they do, Whitley," he said to me, "though I'm sure many of them will be that. No, the best people for this will be the ones who ask why and want to find the answer."

Part of me thinks it's madness, but then, so many of Mercer's best ideas have always been tinged with madness. It was madness for a single man to take on the Thuggee, all for a lost boy. Yet, that turned out well for both of us. I'm sure his new idea will too. Max has already put together a list of likely recruits, and he wants me to contact some of them. When I asked why there were women on the list, he said "You must disabuse yourself of the notion that the fairer sex is suited only for certain things, Whit, my boy. Women are as capable as men in discovering the wonders that await us in the wide world."

Typical.

## The First Meeting

— transcript of Maxwell Mercer's remarks, July 21st, 1923

I would like to call this meeting to order and begin with a short speech.

I asked you to join the Society for Gentlemen because each of you represents the best chance the world has of answering the question "Why?" We are not just a social club, but an organization dedicated to answering that question by exploring the mysteries of the world around us. We are out not to remake the world, but to understand it and to share our knowledge so that others may build their own futures.

To that end, we will not be policemen, vigilantes or a Star Chamber, passing judgment on mankind from our wood-lined halls. We will be delvers into mystery, explorers of the "why" and seekers of hidden truths. By understanding our world, we can prevent others from diverting its secrets to their own ends.

Along the way, we will conflict with those who seek power for its own ends, who oppress the weak and abuse the defenseless. We will deal with those people as we come upon them, with mercy where possible and decisive action where not.

We are here at the dawn of a new age, and I'm proud to have you with me.





August, 1923

We've had the first real rumpus in the club. Stefokowski and Tallon had some heated words with Annabelle. She didn't like how they'd treated her during that affair in New Orleans, and they hadn't liked how she'd ignored their orders. Mercer ended the whole argument, pointing out that Annabelle had earned the nickname "Crackshot" for good reason. Stefokowski grudgingly admitted that Annabelle had saved them in the end and made peace. Tallon grumbled a lot, but I think he'll come around.

Max has been pushing himself nonstop since the first meeting. While half of us were mucking around in New Orleans, he and that reporter Gettel were off in Haiti battling the undead. (I'm amazed I just wrote that word, and not in jest!) Since he's been back, he's sketched up a new two-way radio device for Professor Dixon to perfect, purchased an office in London for the Society and has me looking into recent disappearances in the meat district.

I suggested to Mercer that he slow down, and he gave me a typical reply: "This is a bold time, Whitley. No time to waste enjoying it. We've got work to do!" I'm not sure why he's putting so much energy into this. I can't see it taking more than a year or two to find all the answers, after all.

— excerpt from *The Chicago Sun*,  
September 21st, 1923

## EXPLOSION ROCKS DOWNTOWN

### No Fatalities In Late Night Bomb Blast

CHICAGO — An explosion rocked the residential neighborhood of Wicker Park in the early hours of this morning, destroying the main floor of the Mercer home. Police report no deaths or injuries, though damage is estimated to be into the thousands of dollars.

The Mercer home was the headquarters of the Aeon Society for Gentlemen, which opened a few months ago. Its membership includes Jake "Danger Ace" Stefokowski, "Safari" Jack Tallon and Annabelle "Crackshot" Newfield. The president of the Society is noted philanthropist Maxwell Mercer, who made his family residence available to the club.

Police speculate the bombing may be in retaliation for the recent arrests of several crime figures, based on evidence uncovered by Maxwell Mercer.

October, 1923

Mercer and Stefokowski stopped into the club today to see how the construction was coming along. Jake managed to corner me, giving me a run down on how he and Mercer had managed to save the day in Mexico City. As always, somehow, his plane and flying skills figured prominently. Glad he's still aboard, though — his planes make traveling much easier.

We're making a lot of progress, I think. The attack suggests we're bothering the right types of people. I was surprised no one quit on us. Mercer just gave me an "I told you so" look and commented on these people being the type to do something about it, not sit around and watch. He's right, of course. After all, I'm one of them.

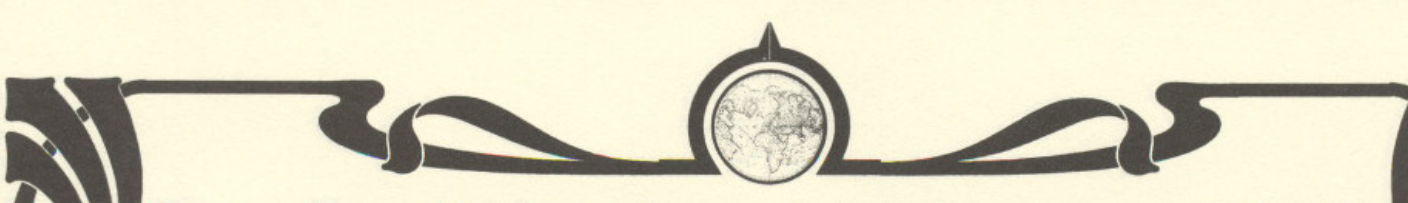
November, 1923

It's been four months, and no one is dead. I'm amazed, sometimes, at the scrapes we manage to escape.

Stefokowski crashed in the Yukon and managed not only to survive, but came out with the Furry Man in one piece. Safari Jack Tallon led that Smithsonian expedition into the Congo, and when it all went bad, he escaped by intimidating the locals. I barely made it out of San Francisco after my run in with the Ubiquitous Dragon and his Dragon's Coil Tong. And we nearly lost Annabelle to a stunt during the filming of a movie in Los Angeles.

I'm pretty sure Safari Jack got a little carried away with those locals, so Max has





been reminding us not to take any of it personally, that we're not pursuing personal vendettas or out to force people to change. After all, the Æon Society is not a secret government and has no intention of becoming one. We fight against secrets.

Some of the secrets we've uncovered have left me in shock, and I'm not sure even Professor Dixon is accepting at face value some of the stories we're reporting. I'm not talking about the ones where Danger Ace again manages to save the day with his plane, either. Lost worlds, people with strange abilities, secret organizations I never suspected – everything goes into the files.

Mercer tells us that these files are the measure of our success. We're not keeping any secrets, so they're open to anyone. So far, not many have asked to see the files. Sarah, of course, when she's in town, but no other reporters. I'm not sure if I'm glad or worried. If some of what we'd discovered made it into the papers, it'd mean panic. At the same time, I think people should know what's going on.

I think Mercer is right to keep things on the up and up. It'd be easy to forget we're doing good things if we hid from the public eye. The fact that only the newspapers are interested in what we're doing is disappointing, but others will come around.

I've been treating this as a bit of a lark, but I think I had better talk to Max. Maybe I can do more.

#### **December, 1923**

Max just returned from Macao, and already, he's thrown together an impromptu meeting. Somehow, he knew that everyone had just made it back into Chicago, and somehow, he was already on top of the question everyone was going to ask. "Whit, I should have thought of it before. We're not the police, but we've got to do something with the people we stop," he said to me almost as soon as he came through the door. I guess some of my mail reached him.

There are already many suggestions being thrown around. Professor Dixon suggested we set up a psychiatric facility, to study the nature of the people we're up against. Tallon has offered one of his remote compounds in East Africa or Arabia as a location. Stefokowski asked why not just turn them over to the police, so I pointed out that many of these people aren't guilty of any local crimes. How do you charge someone for developing a "death ray" before they use it?

Mercer's given the go-ahead on the psychiatric facility, saying "it's not enough to understand the wonders of our world, we must understand the people who experience them."

#### **January, 1924**

Mercer's idea of having us spend Christmas together was perfect. It was like a second family. We're all committed to this cause, driven by Mercer's dedication. It's infectious – I even saw Jack crack a smile or three. We're doing something good here, and I'm part of it. I can hardly wait to see what's next.



# Telluric Energy

## From the Journal of Doctor Primoris

April 1, 1924

Perhaps the most amazing thing about the life I have chosen to lead is how so many men and women without my advantages also choose to lead it. Many die the first time they don their masks or take to the sky in their modified aeroplanes or raise a fist to protect the weak. Too many...

I am convinced that the ones who survive again and again are more than human, even if they seem completely normal. One outrageous coincidence in a lifetime is more than enough for most, but these adventurers often do six impossible things before sunrise each night they patrol the alleys, rooftops and skyways.

"Fortune favors the bold," they explain. This remark is flip and simplistic, but what if it is correct? The fact that most people can use devices that focus pseudoaetheric waves suggests that a great portion of humanity has the potential to personally manipulate such energies. Perhaps boldness helps spark that potential, bringing out the best of humanity in those select few who otherwise remain human?

These "daredevils" cannot consciously tap pseudoaetheric waves for their use, but deep inside them, hidden potential expresses itself in small ways. Guns aimed between their eyes just happen to jam. The wind is strong enough to blow them onto an awning after being pushed from a roof. That aeroplane wing remains intact just long enough for a safe landing or an insane stunt. Their bodies hold together despite terrible damage until the villain is defeated, then the heroes collapse to wake later in a hospital.

The impossible does not generally follow these people as it does those of my ilk, but the improbable is their constant bedfellow. Their minds subconsciously manipulate the pseudoaether; in turn, it manipulates reality in small ways in the adventurer's favor.

- excerpt from *The Physical Review*, October 1923

### "An Alternate Construction of Recent Probabilistic Theories in Quantum Physics."

by Professor Karl Holtz

Stanford University

#### ABSTRACT

Current studies into the nature of the atom point toward a mathematical description of the wave nature of electrons and other particles. This paper will present an argument for an interpretation of these phenomena involving a field of energy that underlies properties we are able to measure. This field, to be called the probability stream, permeates all reality at a level that cannot normally be observed using current technology and scientific methods. All matter and energy interact with the probability stream, which itself shapes the pattern of events.

While no quantitative data will be presented in this preliminary work, efforts will be made to reconcile this new theory with the proven aspects of modern physics. The probability stream does not represent an aether-like absolute reference frame. It may allow transmission of signals faster than the speed of light through itself but, in theory, should not generate interactions in normal energy and matter that violate Einstein's special theory of relativity.



April 24, 1924

Reflecting on my entry of April 1, I realized I inadvertently used a classification created by Styles, Mercer's young apprentice. As I have already committed the intellectual sin of broadly categorizing that which is unique and should defy such facile labels, I may as well compound my error and explain the other appellations.

Aside from "daredevils" and their preternatural luck, those affected by the Telluric Engine fall into two other broad groups: mesmerists and stalwarts.

While not bound by the laughable theories of Mesmer himself, the so-called mesmerists are masters of the powers of the mind. The strange energies unleashed by Hammersmith have given these people phenomenal mental talents, from simple hypnosis to the power of mind over matter. The noted escape artist, Harry Houdini, made a crusade of exposing charlatans who claimed to be able to perform these feats, although he focused on spiritualists rather than mesmerists. He has since been astonished to find that not all mentalists are frauds. The expression on his face, a mixture of surprise and joy, was something to behold. I am told he has since given up his stage career and devoted himself to finding a true medium. I could tell him of the ones I know of, but perhaps it is best to allow him to quest on his own. After all, in the process of seeking out the inspired, our newsworthy contortionist may find inspiration of his own.

Stalwarts wield comparably tremendous powers of the body, even to point of the flat-out impossible. The actions of daredevils and mesmerists can be explained away as luck or trickery, but anyone who sees one of these stalwarts in action knows something incredible has happened. Hair-thin wires may replicate a mesmerist's mind over matter power to lift a teacup, but they cannot explain how a man flexes his thews and knocks a diesel locomotive on its side! From great strength and remarkable resistance to pain to control over the elements and the ability to hurl lightning from their hands, the stalwarts are the true portents of what the future may hold.

These are broad generalizations and, like all such statements, incorrect in some fashion. There is much blurring between groups, and the names Styles picked for them obscure as much as they reveal, if not more. I have met scientists with perfectly sedentary lifestyles who bend probability in ways Styles calls "daredevil-like" and "stalwarts" who were craven weaklings... albeit weaklings with some phenomenal ability no human ever possessed. Nor, naturally, are all mesmerists involved in the manipulation of men's minds.

## MAGIC IS REAL!

Do not **SCOFF**, dear reader. It is Plain as the nose on my face, Magic is a real presence in the world today. The **GOVERNMENT** does not want you to Know, nor do the owners of the Press. They pass the **MIRACULOUS** off as science or mere chance... but they know the **TRUTH**, and so should **YOU**.

Consider the **Æon Society**. You may not have heard of them, but they sit like **SPIDERS** in the middle of the web they have cast about the city. Backed by money from the **Rockefellers** and the **Bolshevists** who are their **ALLIES**, **Æon** seeks to use Magic to help establish a **One World Government** and make slaves of us all.

But **YOU** can fight **BACK!** Magic is real, and it is out there for anyone to use. Just attend the seminars of Doctor (Div) Peter Batar, who will teach **ALL** who wish the use of this **NEW** and **POTENT** force. Magic is in **ALL** of us, not just the **RICH MEN** of the **Æon Society**.

**REproduction and UN-ALTERED dissemination of this IMPORTANT information is ENCOURAGED.**



*I think we can look to myth and legend for a different way to categorize the new breed walking the earth, should categories be desired. Daredevils are the heroes of myth, the Daedaluses as well as the Jasons. Mesmerists are the wizards, witches and sorcerers who haunt the corners of our past. And stalwarts? Stalwarts are gods. Gods of the dawning age.*

*But... if we are to be gods, where will mere mortals fit into our world?*

*July 6, 1924*

*In the two years since the Hammersmith incident, I have given much thought to the matter of his so-called telluric rays. That I still feel the need to commit my thoughts to paper in order to organize them might be mere sentimentality or, perhaps, a sign that I am still relatively human. But regardless of the cause, I have decided to condense my thoughts on this matter tonight.*

*Doctor Hammersmith called his discovery telluric rays. Others have called them Z-rays or harmonic vibrations or even "magic." My old friend Mercer is given to calling it simply "Inspiration," and you can practically hear the capitalization of the word in his voice. None of these labels is quite adequate to my purposes. I'm not totally sure any human language is sufficient to the task. But I have a name that will suit me until I find a permanent solution.*

*This mysterious energy field seems to behave in a manner consistent with the old theories of the luminiferous aether in many ways, even though Messieurs Michelson and Morley ironically proved the nonexistence of such a medium in their attempts to prove its properties. This mysterious radiation seems to propagate at nearly infinite speed, at odds with what men thought they knew about the aether. Hence, I call this fundamental force of nature the pseudoaetheric wave.*

*Pseudoaetheric waves can penetrate any known matter, although they may be slowed or diverted by particularly dense substances or those prepared in a wide variety of special ways. They also interact strongly with electric and magnetic fields and often express them-*

ut Dr. Alexi Cavopol, formerly of Bucharest, Romania, believes he has a simpler explanation for the strange happenings around the world of late.

"Radio is to blame," he asserts. "And I do not mean to say that the public imagination has merely been inflamed by the sensationalism of this new medium. No, it is far more than that."

Dr. Cavopol went on to explain how a radio aerial works, then claimed, "The human nervous system carries electric current, making it also a radio aerial. We are now always bombarded with radio signals, and our bodies act to pick up these impulses. How our brains interpret them is still a mystery, but I believe that many of the mass delusions reported in the media are the result of these signals. Simply reading the news over the air might make people think that a man is flying."

In addition to mass hysteria, Dr. Cavopol thinks that much of what legend calls magic might be the result of certain people being able to not just receive radio signals, but also broadcast them. He calls these broadcasts "ElectroEncephalic Radiation" and says that mesmerism may be a result of this newly-postulated form of energy.

But how can the general public defend itself against either normal radio broadcasts or insidious ElectroEncephalic Radiation? "You must wear a better aerial to block the signals from your body," the doctor explained, showing me the metal rod and battery pack sewn into the lining of his jacket. Of course, the whole apparatus weighs about 10 pounds and has to be recharged daily, plus it looked quite uncomfortable. "The price of freedom from the modern insanity," Dr. Cavopol observed.





— excerpt from *The New York Times*, September, 23rd 1922

## “BOTTLED HEAT!”

In his Staten Island laboratory, Professor Irving Klass claims to have found a new way to store energy and, at the same time, explode the current theories about heat and electricity.

“Ben Franklin was right all along!” says the Professor. “Electricity is a fluid. And so is heat. While the old caloric theory has been disproven by molecular chemistry, my neocaloric proves old Ben was on the right track!”

The excited scientist demonstrated by opening a metal can of some sort. He explained that it was made from aluminum, one of the few substances that could hold this “neocaloric fluid.” He cautioned against touching the can or its contents, although the can appeared to be empty. In truth, the fluid was invisible to the naked eye! With some tongs, he poured this invisible fluid onto a steel bar, which proceeded to melt after what he claimed to be only a few droplets had struck it.

“This will revolutionize the world,” Professor Klass claimed. “A single truck could carry enough neocaloric to power a city for a day. Isolated towns need not wait for electrical wiring to be strung all the way to their location... and the power output of hydroelectric plants can be moved more efficiently than through wires!”

However, there are still safety concerns, the scientist claimed. A spill of even a few ounces of neocaloric could destroy a city block in an instant.

When asked about Professor Klass, Dr. Emerson Ralston of Empire State University dismissed him as a crackpot. “Neocaloric is nonsense. The man’s been trying to publish his work for years, and no one who has read it takes it seriously.” Dr. Ralston dismissed the demonstration as “obvious fakery” and pointed out that even with detailed notes from Dr. Klass, no one had been able to repeat the man’s work.

*Mixed state of wave/particle PA energy? Pity Klass died 1923. Accident? Murder?*



selves via mundane electromagnetic waves in the visible spectrum. For some reason I have yet to ascertain, these waves interact strongly with the minds of certain individuals; I have seen some evidence that all brain activity contains a pseudoaetheric component. Manifestations range from impressive mentally guided abilities such as telepathy or energy manipulation to simply bending probabilities here and there... extraordinary luck, if you will.

More tomorrow. Other matters beckon.

July 7, 1924

The "other matters" revealed themselves to be an action by a newly "Inspired" madman who sought to destroy the city with his psychic lightning. Several of our number fell to his powers but none with permanent injuries, and the madman was eventually lured into a feedback loop by Professor Dixon's metalloceramic microspheres and destroyed himself utterly.

This does, however, provide a convenient context for the consideration of individuals of great power such as the madman who died last night.

The first thing to note is that they — we, more correctly — are rare. For every man or woman with outlandish talents fighting on the side of good or evil or madness, there are dozens with either more subtle Inspiration or none at all. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to who is granted these gifts... many of us who were present at the Hammersmith incident were naturally so gifted, as we were at the center of the unleashing of this pseudoaetheric energy. But people who never came near the site of the Telluric Engine's destruction have also demonstrated powers beyond mortal ken.

The Engine is definitely the key to these talents, the few claims I have heard of powers possessed prior to 1922 are generally untrustworthy or the result of self-delusion. For instance, our mesmerist "dance partner" of last night, Fulminatore, claimed to be a son of Jove and a master of lightning since his birth. Clearly, the man was driven mad by his power and concocted a new life story for himself. But in any case, the mechanism by which the pseudoaetheric waves triggered such powers is unknown to me. Many has been the time I have cursed our incomplete understanding of the human body — I feel I must push medicine forward by a century with my bare hands simply to understand why I have become what I am! It cannot be an evolutionary mechanism, not if the adherents to the Church of Darwin (a rather zealous lot) are to be believed, although their rivals among the Russian Communists might disagree. While the pseudoaetheric waves may have an effect on evolution, such an effect cannot be expressed in those already alive, only in those to be born.

Science gives balm to my frustration in one respect, however. I know that I am not exactly human anymore, not in terms of my living tissue (and perhaps not in any terms!). Samples of my cells do not appear to match those of normal humans when examined under the microscope. While the chromosomes of the nucleus do not seem abnormal within the limits of my ability to observe them, the smaller bodies called mitochondria seem far more active. It is clear that I am what De Vries called a "mutant" in his 1901 paper. If that is true, my chromosomes should bear some differences, as they are the carriers of Mendel's alleles. But here, technology fails me. I do not know how the chromosomes are structured, nor can I, given the current state of science. Such frustration!

Unfortunately, it has not been possible for me to obtain samples of cells from others like me without arousing suspicion. Some already suspect that I know more than I admit to, and I do not wish to confirm those suspicions. For now, I will have to content myself with self-study. Perhaps an X-ray for gross physical differences is in order, assuming I can secure a fluoroscope without attracting undue attention.

A pity that Fulminatore was reduced to ashes. It would have been to my advantage to obtain a small piece of his corpse for study.



July 21, 1924

While I continue my studies of abnormal biology, I sometimes wonder if a more mechanical approach might not prove more useful for now. Not only would advancing the cause of technology provide me with better instrumentation for my biological pursuits, but there is much to be said about the strange and wondrous inventions of this era.

To be sure, some of the more fanciful creations seem to be simple crutches for those who cannot accept that the power of the pseudoaetheric waves flows through their bodies. Such contraptions are easily sifted out, however, for they only work for their creators. A rickety framework of wires and wooden slats becomes an impenetrable "electrobarrier" when operated by its inventor but falls to pieces when he is not around, or a death ray is opened up to reveal only a rat's nest of wires, no power source to be found.

At the other end of the spectrum are inventions that result from an extraordinary "genius" advancing normal technology by years or even decades. Roadmaster's upgraded Duesenberg contains improvements I am sure will revolutionize the automobile industry, if he ever chooses to sell his patents to them. The Stone Monkey's chemical solutions seem to be an advanced form of polymer much stronger than Bakelite. And so forth.

But in between fall the creations that truly intrigue me. This "super-science" employs pseudoaetheric waves directly, although the inventor almost always has his own name for the energy source. Highly purified aluminum, alone among the lighter elements, seems to focus pseudoaetheric rays in the same way it was once claimed to focus N-rays. In fact, many of those who work in that metal claim to have validated the old N-ray theory, despite a conclusive debunking years ago. Otherwise, heavier metals capture and focus pseudoaetheric waves when placed in the right configuration. Many of the more maniacal "evil master-minds" steal vast quantities of gold or platinum to use in their inventions... the metals conduct electricity well and then turn that power into pseudoaetheric rays that may be used for a variety of purposes.

Of greater concern, however, are those who have turned to the new elements discovered by Mme. Curie and her colleagues. These heavy elements are dense enough to channel and focus pseudoaetheric waves and are also powerful sources of more conventional waves, such as gamma and alpha rays. As we proceed with scientific probing of the secrets of the atom, it strikes me that the radioactive actinides such as uranium will be the secret to great power even without pseudoaetheric effects. Should the two be combined... I shudder to think of the consequences.

Enough doomsaying. Regardless of the medium any given inventor employs, such devices have these features in common:

1. Conventional electrical or mechanical energy is converted to pseudoaetheric energy or vice versa. Some strange effect almost always accompanies the forward operation. In the reverse operation, normal effects usually result, but the inventor claims to be drawing energy from some new source: Tesla's Electromagnetic Harp, telluric energy, the fundamental energy of creation, God or gods, &c.

2. Counterintuitive things happen. Granted, much of the new science runs counter to intuition, but these inventions are quite strange, even by that standard.

3. Despite these devices' violations of natural law, almost anyone can use them, unlike the "crutch" inventions. However, no one can seem to reproduce them independently, and mass-production is almost always impossible. Perhaps it requires a certain talent to create these things in the first place... they are devices not native to normal reality but seem comfortable enough existing once created.

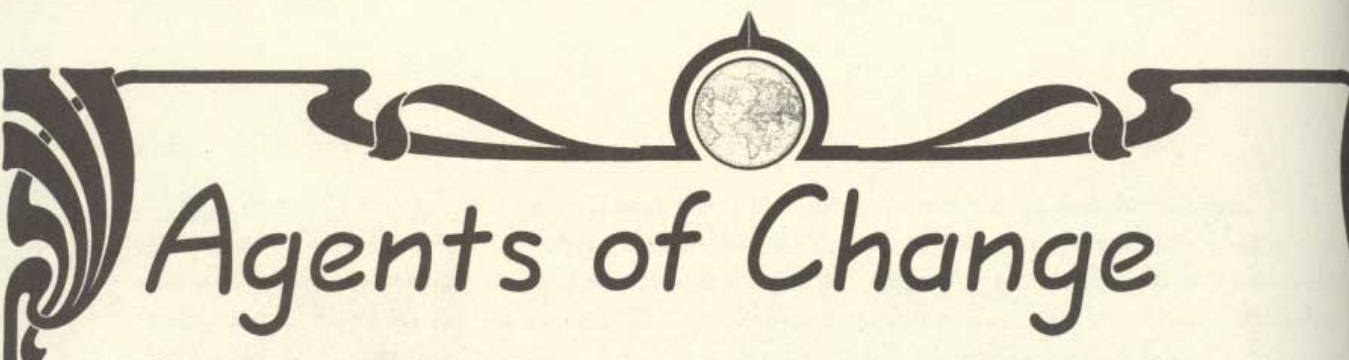


A recent postulate by de Broglie suggests a mechanism for some of the stranger effects many such creations generate. For instance, the Weaponsmith's "never-empty" gun seemingly creates bullets out of nothingness. But between Einstein's assertion a score of years ago that matter and energy are interchangeable and de Broglie's work this year on the idea that waves and particles may be the same thing, I think I have a solution. Pseudoaetheric waves are also particles. Because these waves permeate reality at an arbitrary density, they can be coaxed into particulate form in any shape or density by the right focusing apparatus (or mental power, explaining the tricks of inspired conjurors). The pseudoaetheric waves condense into lead bullets or whatever the creator desires. Granted, the whole truth must be more complex than this, but I feel this is a good start.

Similarly, to touch back on the subject of personal powers, I believe my friend Mercer's ability to travel through time could be the result of a similar phenomenon. His physical body dissolves into pseudoaetheric waves that then travel through time and condense back into a body. Because pseudoaetheric waves travel faster than the speed of light, they are not bound by the causal rules with which Einstein has been binding his general theory of relativity. I have seen at least one "matter transmitter" device that seems to work on this same general principle. Too bad it was utterly destroyed when the dirigible it was mounted in crashed. Now that I know what I do, I know I could have modified it into a time travel device.

For now, however, I must be content to travel through time one day at a time, like the rest of mankind.





# Agents of Change

## Inside the Files

Congratulations, you've been given access to some of the most interesting and disturbing discoveries of the Æon Society for Gentlemen. Various members collected the information here, and I, Whitley Styles, have summarized it where possible. While I am the author of many of these reports, I am not always the source. Where possible, I will indicate the appropriate member to contact for a more direct retelling of events.

The groups detailed here are not all enemies. Some are possible allies, others are, at best, neutral observers of our work. We recommend caution in every case. While the Æon Society has managed to piece together a good picture of who and what these groups are, it is by no means complete.

You may be wondering why these files are open to the public. Part of our charter is to uncover secrets. As our founder is fond of pointing out, if we were to keep our own secrets, it'd be hypocritical. Therefore, what we know is available to anyone who comes by our headquarters and asks. A risk, maybe. But a risk we're all willing to take if it helps.

## The Air Circus

— from the journals of Whitley Styles

When Stefokowski finished with the war, he wasn't finished with airplanes. He took his aerial skill and know-how and put them to work entertaining people. The Carnival of the Air was one of the first air-shows to crisscross the United States like the ground-based circuses before it. The Carnival included more than just planes, of course. Mechanics, hangers on and even some vaudevillians accompanied Danger Ace as he risked death for the crowd.

Of course, Stefokowski, being the Danger Ace, couldn't just fly his planes and move on. Everywhere he went, he'd turn up some kind of trouble or mystery. In his retellings of these early days, the solution invariably involves some kind of daring aerial stunt to save the girl, the day or the town. It seems to be in Stefokowski's nature to assume he's not alone in seeking out danger, and he started wondering if he was the only flier to find himself in these predicaments. Surprisingly, it turns out he wasn't. More than a few air shows regularly encounter criminals and the weird during their travels, both in the US and (for the rare ones who put on shows there) Europe and Asia. Stefokowski exchanged telegrams and letters with these far-flung fliers, working to arrange for a meeting. The place chosen — Kansas City.

As many of you are aware from the newspaper accounts, that was the first time Doctor Zorbo made an appearance. He really chose the wrong time and place to debut. Zorbo's "Death Balloons" were little match for the flying skills of Danger Ace and his friends. After driving off the Doctor, Stefokowski had his great idea: The Air Circus.

The Air Circus is a way for pilots and air shows to exchange information and keep in touch. It also acts as an informal alliance dedicated to protecting the "crowds" from those unscrupulous sorts who would use the skies for evil. From the initial handful who attended the Kansas City meeting, the Air Circus has grown to at least a score of danger seeking pilots and their crews. As Danger Ace likes to say, "whenever danger threatens, wherever there is a mystery to be solved and however the innocent are threatened, the Air Circus will be there to save the day."

The Air Circus attracts more than its fair share of adventure, danger and mystery. This is due partly to the nature of the members and partly to their constant travel into new territory. A typical Air Circus "team" consists of one or two pilots, their mechanics and possibly a hanger-on or two (managers, girlfriends or boyfriends, etc.). Thanks to its ability to



pool expertise, money and knowledge, the Air Circus has access to the cutting edge of aircraft technology. The stunt planes of Air Circus members can out-fly nearly everything short of Igor Sikorsky's record-breaking designs.

The Air Circus doesn't recruit its membership in any formal manner (in fact, I'm not sure if it does anything in a formal manner). Instead, the group relies on a friend-of-a-friend network to ensure that suitable pilots and mechanics are part of the loop. Spending any time with the members of the Air Circus is an invitation to experience something unusual. These pilots seem to attract excitement and danger. Be careful if you must spend any long period around them.

From conversations with Stefokowski, I know that the Air Circus has worked with various groups during its short history. The International Detective Agency has actually employed Air Circus pilots to deliver packages and people quickly, for example. The Ponatowski Foundation has also hired members of the Air Circus for similar duties.

The Air Circus is on uneven terms with the United States Army. The Army is developing its own air corps and finds it embarrassing to rely on civilian help to save the nation. Other foreign military forces seem more inclined to welcome the Air Circus and its aid. The Germans, for example, with their Versailles-restricted air force, always welcome the arrival of one of the Air Circus' traveling shows.

Obviously, the prime enemy of the Air Circus is the infamous Doctor Zorbo, who has attempted to use his own peculiar lighter-than-air weaponry to terrorize the world. To date, the efforts of the Air Circus and the Aeon Society have prevented the good doctor (or should that be "bad doctor"?) from succeeding.



— excerpt from *The Kansas City Star*, May 28th, 1922

## DANGER ACE SAVES DAY

### Death Balloons Destroyed

Despite promises of destruction should he be interfered with, Doctor Manfred von Zorbo was shot down earlier today. The so-called Death Balloons that have threatened the city since yesterday afternoon were destroyed with no loss of life in a spectacular air battle.

The noted air showman, Jake "Danger Ace" Stefokowski, led the aerial charge of a number of show pilots against the Death Balloons. Armed only with pistols, the pilots were able to disable the balloons before any of their deadly cargo could be dropped. While police had ex-

pressed concerns that engaging the balloons would only lead to deaths and urged the city to pay the ransom, the air battle resulted in no casualties.

Doctor Zorbo, the mastermind behind this plot, was able to escape authorities after his balloon was shot down near the Kansas River. Danger Ace speculated that Zorbo may have had accomplices waiting in the city.

The pilots were attending an air show just outside the city when the Death Balloons made their first appearance.





## Branch 9

– from the journals of Whitley Styles

It'd probably be best if you didn't admit that you read this here, and whatever you do, don't pass it on to anyone. Branch 9 is one of the best-kept secrets any government has, and the Æon Society would like to keep it that way. Yes, this seems to go against our goals, but Branch 9 does a lot of good work; letting just anyone know about the organization would severely reduce its effectiveness. If Annabelle hadn't crossed paths with one of their Operators during some trouble in Arizona, we wouldn't even know about them. She earned the following secrets saving his life.

### Annabelle's Information

The Operator Annabelle rescued never did give her his name. Instead, he referred to himself as Operator B1. We can guess that there is at least one other Operator, likely titled A1. It seems equally likely that there are others, with similar titles, though how many is impossible to tell. Based on what B1 revealed, though, the number of Operators in the United States is quite small.

Branch 9 exists outside normal government operations. The Branch's powers far exceed those of the US Marshals, the G-men, the Justice Department or the Attorney General's office. The Operators report directly to the President – not even Congress is aware of their existence. The Branch owes its existence to Teddy Roosevelt, who approved its creation as a means to deal with increasing international and interstate crime. Its mandate has expanded since then, to include dealing with crimes not yet on the books. It is a specialized arm of law enforcement designed to work where local and federal authorities have their hands tied. And it is very good at what it does.

The Operators of Branch 9 focus their attentions on the kind of crime that doesn't make it into the daily newspapers, the kind we've become familiar with in the Æon Society. Things that most people would be better off not knowing. Branch 9 makes a point of uncovering. When a scientist develops a death ray and begins testing it on cattle in Nebraska, Branch 9 gets involved. According to Operator B1, there was an agent on the way to Kansas City to deal with Dr. Zorbo's balloons, until Stefokowski's friends dealt with the problem (see the Air Circus files).

Operator B1 seemed to take pride in the fact that one agent is often all the Branch needs to send to deal with any problem. Operators are highly trained and well equipped to deal with the strange and unusual things they encounter on nearly every mission. Their training includes Asian fighting styles, firearms, engineering and sciences, languages and lessons in the use of the special gear handed out for missions. Most of the Operators have wartime experience, though some civilians find their way into service as well. According to Annabelle's information, the Branch won't recruit from law enforcement, to avoid complications about its extra-legal status.

A final note from Annabelle – apparently Operator B1 had a license to kill, though he was reluctant to exercise what he called "extreme sanction."

### Æon Society's Analysis

A secret organization operating beyond the bounds of the government seems tailor-made for trouble. However, from what we can tell, Branch 9 operates with restraint and professionalism. Since Annabelle's encounter, other members of the Society have crossed paths with the Operators. The meetings have uniformly been on good terms and have helped us build a better picture of Branch 9's activities.





Perhaps the most important discovery is that Branch 9 doesn't operate solely in the United States. Apparently, Teddy Roosevelt spread the idea to his fellow heads of state in Britain, Mexico, China, France and probably other countries we don't yet know participate. These foreign branches (each with some suitably cryptic name, such as Britain's Supplemental Resources Office and France's Field Research & Development Unit) operate mostly independent of one another, each reporting to its respective head of state. Joint ventures are planned on those rare occasions when presidents, kings, prime ministers and the like gather for their summit conferences.

Funding is mostly hidden in government expenses or in inflated purchase orders. Branch 9 uses the money to develop the special equipment issued to the Operators. Equipment we know about includes: a bullet-resistant blue suit, a belt radio and a lockpick that can defeat any known lock. We've heard of other, more specialized equipment being issued to the Operators on an as-needed basis. The remaining funds pay the salaries of the Operators and the costs of their training facilities.

Jack Tallon shared a whiskey or three with one of the British Operators in Kenya. Jack learned that all the Branches have a similar structure. A single Branch Head and his (or her - apparently the Chinese Head is female!) lieutenants dispatch the Operators, which number anywhere from a half dozen to a dozen agents at a time. According to Jack's friend, no Operator has an "M" designation, due to a series of rather bad ends agents assigned that letter came to.

### Recovered Correspondence

The following was recovered from the ruins of a villa in Argentina by Sarah Gettel. The original was in Chinese and has been translated.

- translation of recovered letter fragment.

...continues without interruption. At the current rate of replacement, the entire operation will be ours in another two years.

No one suspects. The confusion here is great, and we can expect tremendous success. However, I must warn you that Operator F3 has reported on recent activities in the South China Seas. She is asking permission to investigate further. I need your guidance on this matter, Master.

You faithful Servant,

Qui-Ju

*In the margin of the letter, in red, was written "Kill."*

### Addendum

There's some reason to believe that the head of the Chinese version of Branch 9, Jiao Qui-Ju, is actually an agent of the Ubiquitous Dragon. Recent events in China have left the Branch ripe for this kind of infiltration. We urge members of the AEon Society to avoid contact with Operators of this Branch.



# The International Detective Agency

— from the journals of Whitley Styles

In the last half of the 19th century, the idea of a private detective became very popular. The Pinkerton Detective Agency established itself as a model of a continental investigative agency, working cases anywhere in the United States. In the 1890s, it faced its first serious competition when the International Detective Agency formed in London, England. In the course of a decade, the IDA opened offices in places as far-flung as Macao, Johannesburg, New Delhi, Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco, Istanbul and Paris. The Agency established minor offices across the world, providing the IDA with an international network of contacts and resources the envy of many governments and corporations.

The Agency is run from London by the Old Man. No one knows his name, and very few people actually meet with him. The rules and organization of the Agency are entirely of his creation. The regional offices each have their own Old Man, typically a veteran of police or detective work, though occasionally a lawyer can earn the position. Each Old Man directs the operation of anywhere from a handful to scores of detectives, or Irregulars. These Irregulars are picked based not only on their ability and experience, but also on their internal moral compass. Irregulars may not be nice people, or particularly "good," but they are, to a man (and woman), immune to the lures of corruption.

I first encountered the International Detective Agency after Mercer rescued me, back in '18. He had worked with the New Delhi office to find me, and the Old Man took a personal interest in helping me recover from my experiences. I learned a lot about the job from that bunch — the importance of legwork, how first impressions have to be backed up with facts and how vital it is to have a personal code of ethics.

Here's what I know about how the IDA operates:

It was created in the late 1890s to combat the increasingly international nature of crime. The IDA's goals are similar to those of Branch 9, but its methods and operations are



HOPE™



not. The IDA is not bound to any governmental policy and is available to any private citizen able to afford its standard rate.

The International Detective Agency recruits its Irregulars from the police, from other detective agencies and from the ranks of prosecuting attorneys. Existing Irregulars compile a dossier on a potential recruit, focusing on his personal ethics and job skills. The Irregulars present the Old Man of the region with this dossier, and he makes the decision to approach the potential recruit or not.

New recruits undergo training in the Agency's methods and procedures. They learn how and when to contact other offices, how to deal with various situations and how to work with other Irregulars without stepping on any toes. By the end of the training, an Irregular is one of the best.

The International Detective Agency provides Irregulars for bodyguard duties, auxiliary police assignments and as investigators for insurance fraud. An Irregular may also be involved in divorce matters, missing person cases and kidnap victim recovery. The IDA may also provide armed messengers, do background checks and consult on security matters. All this for \$5 a day, plus expenses.

The IDA deploys its Irregulars solo or in teams of two or three agents. The number of agents assigned depends on the nature of the job. If an Irregular requires additional agents, these are made available when possible. The goal of any IDA investigation is success, not efficiency or profit. A happy client is a good thing. While there is no official dress code in the IDA, Irregulars tend toward clean suits. Somewhat scandalously, the IDA employs female Irregulars and encourages them to dress in suits (with low heels).

The IDA's international nature allows it to pursue leads across the globe and across national boundaries. Its multinational recruiting allows it to combine the best of many nations' investigation techniques. Thanks to the Old Man in London's encouragement, the IDA has adopted many of the newest methods of identification - fingerprinting, ballistics and even some stuff I've only read about in dime novels.

I strongly recommend that AEon Society members who have the chance work with the International Detective Agency and learn a thing or two from its operations. Given the Irregulars any aid you can, should they need it. These are the good guys.

**- excerpt from memo to the Old Man, author Roland Broomfield, 10 October 1922**

I believe I have found more evidence of the existence of the so-called "King of the World." There has been a recent wave of thefts, all involving diamonds, all precisely coordinated to occur within hours of each other, in eight cities around the globe. In each case, the diamond was the only item removed. As per our standing instructions from the Old Man, I have noted these thefts in the attached document.

While it is not impossible that these thefts are the result of coincidence, it is highly improbable. As we know, that's always a clue to something deeper.

The Denberg family has retained me to recover their lost Denberg Diamond and I will use this opportunity to investigate possible links to the other crimes. I strongly advise that we attempt to get other Irregulars involved in these cases.

**- excerpt from memo to Roland Broomfield, author "The Old Man," 11 October 1922**

Once more, I must urge caution upon you, Irregular. The individual you pursue is dangerous beyond measure. Do not make any missteps, and be certain to report all your findings to the local office at regular intervals. We have lost many Irregulars pursuing this "crime lord," and I have no desire to add you to the list.

**- excerpt from *The Times*, 17 October 1922**

The body of Roland Broomfield, a private investigator in the employ of the International Detective Agency, was recovered from the Thames late last night. The police are reporting the death as a suicide, as the body showed no signs of violence. Initial reports suggest that Mr. Broomfield placed bricks in his jacket pockets, and then leapt from the London Bridge. He leaves behind no next of kin.





# The Ponatowski Foundation

— from the journals of Whitley Styles

We are not alone in our quest for answers to the mysteries of the world. I hesitate to call the Ponatowski Foundation our competition, but some evidence suggests it might consider us that way. In recent months, I have noticed that whatever exploration we might attempt, there seems to be a member of the Foundation either a few days ahead or behind us. However, I don't believe this is anything sinister. The Ponatowski Foundation has been around for decades and has funded some of the more important explorations of Africa and South America in that time.

According to its official history, a group of Russian and Eastern European nobles came together in 1902 to establish the Slavic Scientific Foundation. The stated goal of the Foundation was to finance and encourage the exploration of Russia for scientific purposes. In the period from 1902 to 1912, the Foundation sponsored over a dozen expeditions into Siberia and the Gobi Desert and even sponsored an attempt to explore the bottom of the Black Sea. The results of these expeditions appeared in print in the foundation's *Journal of Exploration*.

In 1912, the Foundation moved from Moscow to Warsaw, adopted the name of Count Wladisaw Ponatowski in return for his donation of land and buildings and announced that it would now fund research and exploration into Africa and South America, as well as Russia. With the expanded focus, the Foundation attracted the interest of a more international group of anthropologists, archeologists and scientists. In the two years before the war, the Foundation funded a half dozen expeditions into Africa. Unlike previous expeditions, the results of these were not published and remain secret even today. The stated reason is that the related files were lost during the war.

The Foundation apparently closed up shop for the duration of the war. In 1919, the Foundation reopened and resumed pretty much where it left off. Rumor suggests that the Foundation was actually active during the war, smuggling wealthy Russians out of the country before the October Revolution. It is clear that the resources of the Foundation have greatly increased in recent years, and its attempts to fund the White Russian Army in 1919 and 1920 gives some weight to the suggestion that it is a front for Russian expatriates.

The Foundation resumed publication of its journal in 1923, but as a details-light entertainment magazine. The *Æon Society* library has some back issues, and you can see that, while the magazine appears to give a comprehensive account of an expedition, it leaves out important evidence and conclusions. I'm unclear why this is, though I've heard Mercer and Dixon suggest the Foundation is finding stuff that people would be better off not knowing. Given what we've found, I wouldn't be too surprised.

The Foundation seems willing to back almost any expedition that can put together a reasonable proposal to catch the directors' fancy. I have heard that it funded an expedition to look for an underground kingdom located beneath Germany, with an entrance located somewhere along the Rhine. I know the Foundation funded a research trip into the Amazon, to determine if the local tribes were actually descended from Atlanteans. It's also behind the current attempt to find Noah's Ark. I would be more amused if our *Æon Society* hadn't found some strange stuff itself.



## Addendum

--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

It is my belief that the Ponatowski Foundation is actually a front organization created in the days before the Russian Revolution by the master criminal known as the Czar. As part of his grand plan to remake the world as a Russian empire, he intends to use the Foundation's discoveries. Whatever secrets or artifacts it uncovers go into the general pot of materials to be used in his schemes.

It is notable that a number of the Foundation's members physically intervene in local matters, shaping policy to suit their own views or those disturbingly in keeping with the Czar's agenda. They are also not above using intimidation and extortion to get their way. I must admit that this belief remains conjecture at present. Aside from a few disquieting coincidences, I have no proof. And I must admit that most of the Foundation's members seem to pursue exploration and research honestly. Still, your Aeon folks are advised to use caution when dealing with the Foundation.

— excerpt from *The Times*, 3 January 1924

### Polish Foundation to Search for Eastern Atlantis New Theory of Human Origins to be Tested

City connoisseurs of the avant-garde will no doubt remember last September's striking exhibition of Slavic artwork, all presenting Biblical and mythological themes reinterpreted in motifs taken from Eastern barbaric cultures. Some observers apparently found truth as well as grandeur in the exhibit, as the Ponatowski Foundation, known to us as the patron of scientifically valuable if sometimes conceptually obtuse expeditions, has announced that on May next it will send a fleet of vessels to dredge portions of the Black Sea for evidence of antediluvian civilizations there.

Count Felix Ponatowski, a distaff cousin of the foundation's patron, told gentlemen of the press gathered in this city that the expedition will attempt to establish the preexistence of a highly refined society in the Eastern marches. "It is our hope," he declared, "to show that, in fact,

the classical writings known to all educated men that portray barbarians and savages beyond the Grecian and Persian pale are a sort of propaganda, the machinations of the jealous kaisers of the day."

When asked by one particularly skeptical reporter whether it was the policy of the Foundation to take scientific hypotheses from artists admittedly under the influence of narcotic substances, the Count laughed and replied, "In fact, you yourself reported more than eight months ago on preparations for an upcoming expedition of ours. Check your own notes, sir, and remove the beam from your own eye." He went on to explain that the work had been in progress for some time and that there were mutual influences extending back to the Ponatowskis' work with some of the artists as displaced persons immediately after the war....





# The Contedorri

— from the journals of Whitley Styles

I think that, by now, we are all familiar with the stories of a “King of the World” or mastermind directing organized criminal activity around the globe. In my work with the Irregulars, I’ve often heard it mentioned and filed it away. Every police officer or district attorney I’ve crossed paths with denies the existence of any one central figure, chalking up questionable events to coincidence and chance. Even Mercer has suggested the idea is something better suited to cheap magazines, not serious study.

Until last week, I didn’t even half-believe in it. Last week, though, I ran into Lefty Gomez for the 14th time. Lefty Gomez is a fairly gifted thug — his talents lie in his fists and his absolute lack of fear. He keeps turning up like a bad penny, though. I’ve found him working for everyone from a common street tough to a rather wealthy oil magnate. We’re talking about a man who is lucky to have crossed the tracks, yet he seems to have no problem finding work.

I cornered him and put some questions to him forcefully. I think he believed me when I explained how it would be in his best interest to talk. What he told me has me thinking we’d better reexamine our assumptions about the criminal activity we’re seeing.

Lefty Gomez, you see, doesn’t work alone. In fact, according to Lefty, he’s part of something bigger than any of us can imagine. I suspect there’s some exaggeration involved, but I believe him when he claims to be more than just a common thug. He’s “contedorri,” he says. Like from history — he’s a mercenary soldier, working for the highest bidder.

I pressed Lefty for more details and convinced him that, while he might be killed later if he talked, if he didn’t talk, I’d see to it he was going to be killed sooner. I wasn’t happy about that, but this information seemed important.

The Contedorri is a group of criminals that trains other criminals, then hires them out to whoever can pay the price. According to Lefty, it provides safecrackers, demolition specialists, engineers and thugs as required. The price isn’t cheap. Lefty apparently costs his employer \$8 a day (which might be generous, given my experiences with Lefty). A specialist in a particular field can go for as much as \$20 a day. Members contract out for special jobs, helping those groups or individuals that need talent but can’t develop it locally. The Contedorri also provides legal assistance to its members, along with medical aid when required.

I hope you understand the significance of this. We have here a group that acts as a central switching house for criminal talent. No wonder I’ve run into Lefty so many times, in so many different situations. He’s been contracting out. From what I’ve learned, the Contedorri must number into the hundreds worldwide, all well-trained and dedicated criminals.

Lefty couldn’t tell me the name of his leader or much about the history of the group. Well trained or not, he admits he is still just a thug. I strongly suggest we track down others from this organization and find out more. The mere existence of this Contedorri makes the suggestion of a criminal mastermind far more credible, to my mind.

## Addendum

Speaking with other AEon members in the field and piecing together further anecdotal evidence, I believe we have a decent working hypothesis regarding the Contedorri. Not that we can prove any of it, of course.

As long as there have been societies large enough to support professional criminals at all, would-be masterminds have organized criminals. It’s possible that some cells within the Contedorri run back in continuous or nearly continuous lines to ancient Roman and Etruscan gangs. However, the overall organization dates to the religious wars of the Renaissance. A band of a dozen professional mercenaries set up a home base for themselves in the Alps of northern Italy in the 1650s and, thanks to luck and determination, managed to last long enough to pass on a network of contacts to their heirs. The second generation nearly lost it all, since most of them lacked their parents’ ruthless ambition and talent for careful





slaughter, but the offspring of the founders' lieutenants included enough good soldiers to keep things together. Since then, the Contedorri has continued to take in fresh blood and weed out useless lineages with each new generation.

Here's an interesting detail: The de Winter family has ties to the Contedorri running back to the group's founding – de Winters at the court of Louis XIV were among the Contedorri's first regular clients, calling on the mercenaries for hit jobs and harassment of court rivals. After the French Revolution, a handful of de Winters escaped to Italy and met up with the Contedorri again. For more than 50 years, up until the revolutions of 1848, de Winters provided the Contedorri with bookkeepers and other administrators, all the while stockpiling funds for a glorious return to nobility and power. It didn't work; once again, nearly all the de Winters perished. The last of her line, the lovely Lady Argentine de Winter is somehow involved with the Contedorri: we're just not sure in what capacity.

## The Rational Experimentation Group

– from the journals of Whitley Styles

Ever wonder why there are laboratories in remote locations around the world, just waiting for some scientist to move in and begin experimenting with something dangerous? Back around 1922, Safari Jack Tallon wondered enough to try looking into the matter. What he discovered concerns even Max.

The laboratories are constructed under the watchful eye of the Rational Experimentation Group (REG). Sounds official, doesn't it? We were surprised to find that the REG doesn't officially exist, except in a handful of letters and memos sent to architects and construction firms around the world. Trying to trace those letters leads nowhere – empty offices or post office boxes that don't exist.

I've dragged from Tallon half-remembered conversations with site foremen and pieced facts together from various notes of his concerning what he's been able to get out of the occasional scientist he's found working in one of the laboratories. What these various pieces to a larger puzzle tell us is this: The Rational Experimentation Group is encouraging some researchers to push the boundaries of ethical science and is providing them with the ways and means to do so.

Some particular crimes we've been able to link to the REG include: providing human test subjects, encouraging live tests on human populations and outright theft of the results of such experimentation. I'm talking here of scientists developing death rays, poison gases and new plagues – and being given free rein to produce results on human subjects.

Okay, so that's what the REG does. How it does this is much less clear. As near as we can tell, it must have two groups – the one that arranges for laboratory construction and the one that kidnaps and provides the human test subjects. The first group is easier to pin down – despite the false addresses, this group still pays for work. We've been able to trace things back to a trust fund, administered by the Rational Experimentation Group of Switzerland. The trail dies pretty fast up against the Swiss, however.

A drunk banker did manage to let slip a few details to me in a friendly conversation one night, though. According to him, the REG gets regular infusions of funds from three separate accounts. The accounts belong to wealthy scientists... but my friend could not be persuaded to part with any names or nationalities.

The second half of the Rational Experimentation Group seems to be a regular employer of the Contedorri. Using these criminals, the REG singles out those who have little or no family and kidnaps them (in the case of those with little family, the REG seems inclined to grab all the relatives as well). These people are then delivered to the scientists who need them. Investigation into the kidnappings is discouraged with either bribes or intimidation (a few local sheriffs were willing to explain this process to me on the promise of anonymity).





— excerpt from the *Los Angeles Times*, June, 17th 1919

## STRANGE DOINGS IN SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department reported today that it has discovered the whereabouts of more than a dozen youths kidnaped throughout the Southland over the last two months but that the answer itself raises fresh questions. Following a tip provided by local astronomy buffs observing from various San Gabriels' peaks, police discovered a freshly constructed private road leading north from Echo Mountain to a ravine furnished with three concrete bunkers, all evidently erected since the last severe winter rains. Inside, police found a variety of scientific apparatus and cells for all the kidnaped youths, plus room for as many more.

According to the youths, they never

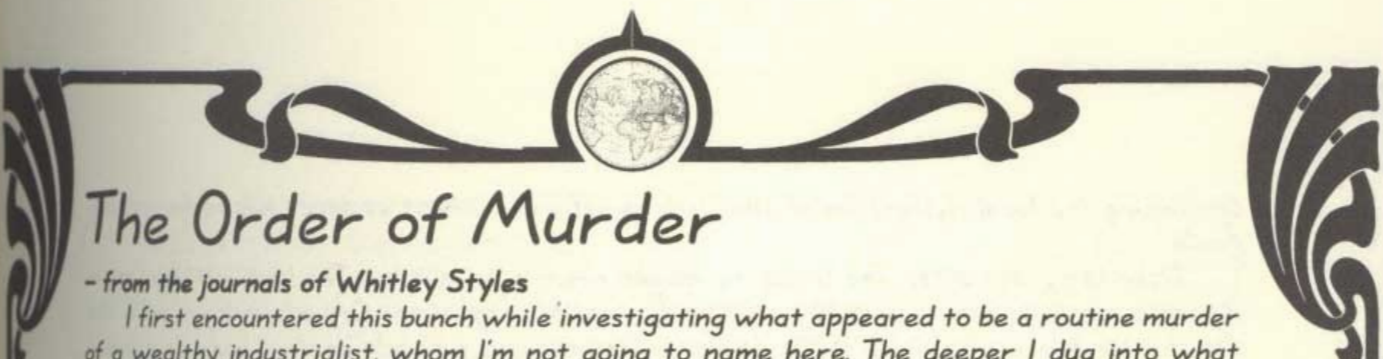
saw or heard anyone from the moment of their kidnaping, performed with the aid of chloroformed cloths. Attendants of unknown identity provided food and water while the youths slept; police suspect that there may have been regular administration of drugs to keep the youths on a synchronized schedule.

Deputy Sheriff Dana Jones told the press, "This is by far the most inhumane plot ever uncovered by our officers. We suspect Bolshevik influence; no God-fearing American could have set out so methodically to prepare children as lab animals." Deputy Jones provided supporting details, which are too gruesome for repetition here, and several reporters were overcome during the hearing....

*Perhaps most troubling of all the information uncovered about the Rational Experimentation Group is that it may well be the product of an alliance between the Machinatrix, the Ubiquitous Dragon and Mister Saturday. It seems evident that each benefits from the products of the research. Unfortunately, they're all too slick to leave any hard evidence connecting them to anything. The final question – just why does the REG do what it does? – is the biggest mystery of all.*

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# The Order of Murder

- from the journals of Whitley Styles

I first encountered this bunch while investigating what appeared to be a routine murder of a wealthy industrialist, whom I'm not going to name here. The deeper I dug into what looked like a robbery gone bad, the more I found to suggest that there wasn't much robbery but an awful lot of bad. The evidence was staged, and not in a shoddy way. It easily fooled the local police and, eventually, even the old lady who'd made a habit of poking her nose into strange crimes. However, things just weren't adding up.

The only items missing were of sentimental value. The body didn't look quite right, when compared to photos. The broken window was broken from the inside. They were all the standard signs of a true mystery, rather than some plain homicide. I was intrigued and did some more digging.

I found a chink in its wall of silence, thankfully. I'm going to keep the source's identity a secret, since I know our records here are not secure. However, I'm not sure how much I trust the information, given the source. It's nothing I can get confirmation about, for obvious reasons, but from talking to other members of our Society, I think this bunch has been on the opposite side more than a few times.

I've traced the Order of Murder to a cabal of English noblemen during the reign of Henry VIII. They had some quibbles with the decision King Henry made regarding Anne Boleyn, so they faked her execution and spirited her out of the country. A few years later, they performed the same favor for Catherine Howard, and so began their existence as the *Ordo Occisionis*. The nobles and Henry's ex-wives began to assist other wealthy people in faking their deaths for a fee. The Order soon developed into a full-fledged secret society that fakes the deaths of those able to pay its price. Its clientele during the 16th century consisted mostly of unfaithful wives and treasonous nobles but expanded in the 17th and 18th centuries to include anyone who could meet its price. Each individual rescued joined the Order, sworn to secrecy on pain of death. The Order's coffers got a good amount of the new member's portable wealth in the process.

According to my source, things have changed recently. In the days before police, the *Ordo Occisionis* operated without much need for care or skill. You bribe a headsman, find a handy peasant to stand in for the body, and you're set. Then along comes some Frenchman with a good idea, and the whole scheme is in jeopardy.

Its members could have given up at that point, but the money was too good. They changed the organization's name to the Order of Murder and changed their methods. In the last few decades, the Order has employed a cadre of specialists in plastic surgery and forensics, along with the typical forgers. Apparently, with surgery, the Order can change someone's appearance enough that his own mother would never recognize him! Experts on its team are pioneering work in replicating fingerprints and identifying suitable phrenological matches. These experts falsify the evidence at the scene of the supposed crime and disguise those rescued. In many cases, those rescued by the Order of Murder can resume a semblance of their old lives, claiming to be long-lost relatives or old associates (with falsified documents to support the assertion). Others take up residence in different countries around the world and attempt to begin their lives again. Teams of three to five members handle the field work for each case.

While the method may have changed, the clientele hasn't. The Order still makes the wealthy and powerful disappear, for a price. The Order of Murder occasionally employs members of the Contedorri to take the fall for a falsified crime. The nature of the organization's work puts it at odds with most law-enforcement agencies - not that the police are willing to believe it even exists. (The exceptions being those so corrupt that they actually work quietly with the Order in exchange for money.) So far, I've identified at least three cases where the individual in question was facing arrest, bankruptcy or some other form of personal ruination. With an apparent death, the investigations came to close, and the individual escapes scot-free.



Convincing the local authorities of the Order's efforts without evidence has so far proven futile.

Despite appearances, the Order no longer resorts to murder. The bodies it uses in its disappearances are the result of a cellular duplication process the Order developed with the aid of a Dr. West in the late 1800s. This process produces a nearly perfect body double but one lacking intelligence or free will. I suspect the Order produces these doubles in its head-quarters and laboratory, located under a brownstone in London.

The three highest-ranking members of the Order go by the titles Lord Scrope, Lord Cambridge and Lord Northumberland, in that order. Currently, Reginald Farshingham (an Englishman supposedly slain at Khartoum) holds the position of Lord Scrope, while Genevieve St. Cyr (wife of a wealthy Frenchman, believed murdered in her bed in Paris) is Lord Cambridge. The position of Lord Northumberland is currently open, as the last titleholder passed away from old age.

While *Æon* does not involve itself in personal vendettas, I will be pursuing this one on my own (I suspect that various governments' Branch 9s are also expressing an interest). One of the things that worries me is this: what happens to the offspring of the Order's members? Are there whole families, generation after generation, living secretly out there somewhere, thinking of themselves as the ones who really run the show? The world suffers enough from the schemes of visible nobles and lords; there could be real trouble if there are unknown princes and kings trying to steer things their way.

— excerpt from *The Times*, 18 May 1923

### Prominent Financier Dead in Bushy Park Possible Revenge After Commercial Tragedy

Well-known financier J. Ainge Lawoys was the victim of a grisly murder last night, this paper learned from a source at Scotland Yard. The police have not been forthcoming with information on the death because of surrounding confusion, according to our source. As was reported in Tuesday last's financial news, Lawoys Security funds were discovered in substantial disarray, apparently as the result of systematic manipulation, by party or parties unknown, intended to secure immediate cash at the expense of all longer-term concerns. Mr. Lawoys himself was under suspicion, and police fear that some private citizen took it upon himself to exact a more certain revenge than the law might provide.

American tourists discovered the body this morning in the northeastern corner of the park, while on a birding stroll. Mr. Lawoys had been shot by a large-caliber handgun no less than four times in the

head and twice in the chest, and the arms and portions of the chest had been drenched in some flammable liquid and ignited. Identification of the body was indeed delayed for some hours, owing to the relative deficiency of marks on which to base a certain establishment of identity. Distant relatives came down from Cambridge and confirmed the presence of minor, but distinctive, birthmarks.

These relatives, not identified further by our source, also told a tale of Mr. Lawoys' investigation of a somewhat similar death in his youth as a colonial policeman in the Punjab and agreed with the police speculation of revenge over investment handling as a motive. However, they strenuously denied any culpability on the deceased's part and shared correspondence indicating his substantial distress over the affair. A record of their remarks made available to us indicates....



--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

Imagine my surprise at finding Hans Kupperman alive and well, drinking in a shanty outside Marrakech. This is a man who died in Munich, before the war, sitting here hale and healthy, drinking schnapps. You might recall the matter -- there was an outraged household servant, questions of propriety involving the use of company funds and an impending arrest. Hans Kupperman turned up dead in a back alley in Munich, apparently the victim of a robbery gone awry. Yet, unless I saw a ghost, he still lives.

I approached and introduced myself, knowing my name would likely mean little to him. He introduced himself as Walter, with a passable attempt at an American accent. We talked of things travelers talk of -- the weather, the food and the accommodations. He consumed much schnapps, more than I did, and it loosened his tongue.

He spun me a fantastic tale of how, in his darkest hour and the victim of terrible lies manufactured to gain control of his company, an angel approached him. This "angel" was an Englishman who promised a new life and rescue from his demons in exchange for simple money. Money was something Hans could part with. The Englishman, who used the name Lord Scrope, whisked Hans away to Marrakech.

Hans was now part of something larger than his problems. Since the time of his "rescue," the Englishman has often returned to ask for Hans' advice and aid in saving others in similar predicaments. Apparently, Hans belongs to something he calls the Order of Murder, which finds his particular talents with pharmacology to be of great use to them. He tells me that Marrakech has proven an excellent laboratory for his work in sedatives and anesthetics. "There are others like me, all over the world. Men and women who are dead to people like you, lady. But we aren't dead. We just wish we were."

With that statement, Hans stumbled off to his home and I to my room. Did I imagine the resemblance? Were these merely the ramblings of a drunken man looking to earn free schnapps? I fell asleep hoping it was so.

## Le Salon des Femmes Nouveaux

-- from the journals of Whitley Styles

In the vast majority of cases, it doesn't take long for me to figure out what I think of a new group, whether I approve of its goals and methods and how I think the Society should deal with it, if at all. A few organizations take me longer to evaluate because of their complexity. A very few leave me baffled and torn between enthusiastic agreement and passionate dissent. Le Salon des Femmes Nouveaux is one of those few.

I must start by writing as clearly as I can how much I agree that women around the world suffer unjustly. Sometimes I still dream of the suttee fires I witnessed while held by the Thuggee: widows burned alive when their husbands died, for those who don't know the word "suttee." The British have done their best to stamp out the custom, but there are always men (and even women) who think it's so important to burn widows alive that they're willing to risk punishment for it. When we went with Mercer on that trip to China, I saw the custom of foot binding still practiced, even under a supposedly enlightened new post-imperial government: girls' feet broken and broken again until they become a tiny mass of deformed bones, to satisfy the Chinese belief that smaller feet are sexy. I've seen women subjected to every kind of harassment and abuse, in "civilized" and "barbaric" lands alike.



Even if I didn't care about justice as a principle, I would like to think that I could still recognize the practical cost of losing the insights of half the race's population. We simply cannot have too many strong minds and bodies working to make the world better, and any belief that would have us cast some aside is clearly the enemy of the kind of future all of us in the Society hope for.

So when I first heard of an international alliance of women out to take control of their own destinies, I was immediately favorably inclined. Yes, I thought, *good for them for banding together to address their distinctive concerns.*

I first learned of the Salon last winter, in the Caribbean. Stefokowski and I were following rumors of a white slavery ring somewhere in the leeward islands, which we thought (wrongly, as it turned out) might be connected to one of the Ubiquitous Dragon's many plots. By the time we came across the slavers' den, their prisoners had all been set free, and the slavers themselves had been crucified in their own den, many of them clearly tortured to death. "For the New Woman" was written on the walls in half a dozen languages.

We've seen the handiwork of these New Women several times since then. In northern India, they engineered a brilliant series of raids that liberated women condemned to suttee and transported them to safety with sympathetic émigrés in Europe and America. The Femmes Nouveaux managed to escape detection at every step along the way – without detectives as good as the ones we've got, nobody would ever have put the pieces together. Our interviews with the rescued women didn't give us much beyond a general impression of formidably competent women who didn't strike their rescuers as at all "manly," but did seem completely fit for every task that arose in the course of the rescue. In Argentina and Brazil, money came to support women trying to engage in labor organization, in the name of the Salon. The rest of our encounters fell somewhere between those extremes of direct action and quiet help from afar.



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Safari Jack, of all people, was the one who discovered the Salon itself. It wasn't in Paris or some other French city, but in Indochina, in what had been a mission until a generation or so ago and some petty bandit's deprivations. Tallon came riding out of the jungle in search of whatever his prey of the day was into a small clearing, where, in moments, he was completely surrounded by armed women and girls. They made him dismount and questioned him very thoroughly, offering few explanations in return. I gather from his description and the amusing little loopholes in it that he may have tried to brazen it through with his brand of swagger and gotten nowhere fast.

Just a few weeks ago, a dour Indochinese woman who identified herself as "Minh Truong" approached Sarah on the streets of Chicago and offered to tell her about the Salon. Sarah remembered Jack's tale and promptly accepted. The rest of this file belongs to her.

--dispatch from Sarah Gettel

Sarah Gettel: Thank you for offering me this opportunity, ma'am.

Minh Truong: I am one of the Femmes Nouveaux. You don't need my real name.

SG: No, I don't, not if you'd prefer not to share it with me. Tell me about the Salon.

MT: When I was a girl, the missionaries taught us about the creation of the human race. "Male and female created He them," the book said.

SG: So it says, yes.

MT: Don't patronize me, miss.

SG: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.

MT: You see me as some shopkeeper or maid or something harmless, maybe somebody who did something once but now only bears tales. You're wrong. Now let me speak.

SG: Certainly.

MT: So I grew up believing that each of us carried the mark of God. But it soon became obvious that men didn't see the mark in us, or didn't care. They use us and destroy us at their whim. When the bandits came for the missionaries, I survived only by disguising myself as a little boy. They laughed at me and told me I could grow up to be just like them. They killed the priests, raped the nuns and dragged off the other girls for more lingering fates.

You have a tear in your eye. But why should you cry? If you are not willing to do what it takes to put an end to such things, then you should accept them as a fact of life. I decided that I would not accept them. I realized that men had forfeited the mark of God and that there would be no peace or justice until women rediscovered the mark within themselves and forced men to submit.

SG: Aren't you just planning to do back to them what they've done to you, then?

MT: Absolutely not. My sisters did not deserve death. But the men who brought death to them do. And the men who let those men bring death deserve the punishment of accomplices. This is the simple, pure form of justice, such as prevailed in Eden and will again when we rule the world.

I traveled the world, in whatever disguise I could manage, to see what other women experienced. I learned languages and customs, and I taught my simple message. In every land, a few are willing to hear it. It was a Parisian lady who referred with a smile to my "salon." I keep the name to honor her memory.


SG: Her...?

MT: She died fighting the good fight, under circumstances that are none of your concern.

SG: So the Salon is...

MT: Le Salon des Femmes Nouveaux is an insight. We are restoring the lost face of God, which is female. We are building tomorrow without the taint of the sins men have carried forth from Eden. We do whatever's necessary to make redemption a thing that happens now, not in some indefinite never-never land.





And when you are ready to hear the truth of what we say, we will be there to speak it to you and welcome you to join us. Until then, you are part of the masses that we pity but do not let stop us.

Postscript: At this point, I became momentarily dazed. When the confusion passed, the woman was gone.

I must admit that I believe the Salon is precisely what this woman Minh Truong says it is. Depending on their assessment of the needs of the moment, its members can be warriors, scholars, teachers, healers or just about anything else. The Salon itself, headquartered deep within the Vietnamese jungle, aims to produce women capable of excellence in all fields and assembles its students into teams who, between them, have all the skills that its founder, the aging Minh Truong, deems necessary. She then sends them out into the world to spread the word of women's destiny as harbingers of a redeemed humanity.

Further investigation suggests that would-be successors to Truong disagree among themselves as to whether the forceful end of male oppression should take priority over education and the like, and when (if) Truong passes away, the struggle to be her replacement will shape the Salon's future direction.

## The Inquiry

— from the journals of Whitley Styles

This entry began as a note about the absence of something, rather than its presence. In the summer of 1922 — before the founding of the Society itself, though at this point several of us were regularly working together — my mathematician acquaintance David Aramission, then completing his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, did an informal study comparing the distribution of income changes among graduates of his college and others over the last decade. (There's some complicated argument I don't really understand going on around such things, with diatribes about whether this or that level of income is socially detrimental or something.) While studying the data he'd acquired, David noticed something odd: The careers of the graduates who got involved with postwar diplomacy and reconstruction were, on the whole, significantly stunted. They didn't get promoted as fast, they were more likely to run into office politics problems, they were even more likely to have serious accidents.

He mentioned it to me on one of our visits, and it sounded interesting enough to warrant follow-up. After all, we of the Society have a particular interest in the fortunes of people out to build new worlds. I passed along his information to some of our scholarly associates and let them go to it. Three months later, I heard from David again, and now, he sounded worried. "Whitley," he said, there's something going on here that isn't just accidental."

It took him most of two days to summarize the evidence for Mercer, Primoris and myself. I'm not even going to try to repeat all of it; you can consult the appendices yourself for the details. What it boils down to is pretty straightforward: People who took part in war efforts, both during the war and after, are suffering. The tricky part is that they're not suffering in really big, dramatic ways. The murder rate is up a little, and the disappearance rate is up more, but mostly, it's a matter of cumulative minor misfortunes. The really tricky part is that the targets aren't people at the top — not heads of state or even ministry heads nor chairmen of the board — but the often-anonymous people several rungs down the ladder of command. The people behind this were and are aiming at chiefs of staff, heads of file departments, interoffice liaisons and the like, the people most often involved in interpreting



general directions and applying them to specific cases.

This hooked Primoris' interest. He's fairly sympathetic to the whole idea of that kind of "social engineering" (as anyone who's heard him argue it with Mercer knows), and I think he saw these mysterious adversaries as somehow crowding onto territory he regards as his. Certainly, his response reflected at least as much purely intellectual curiosity in it as genuine moral outrage. Mercer decided to let him do some more investigating, while we attended to other matters.

It was the spring of 1923 before I heard from David again. He mailed me the following.

— excerpt from the *New York Post*, February 2nd, 1923

### Professorial Scam Uncovered Scandal in Ivy League

Officials in the New York Stock Exchange confirmed today that they have been working with police to identify and arrest a network of would-be stock frauds in the halls of academia. Police in Boston and elsewhere made their arrests today, and full details about the culprits

will be forthcoming. Preliminary reports indicate that the scheming professors sought to exploit their knowledge of advanced mathematical processes to manipulate stocks in ways that would generate quick gains followed by sustained losses....

I called him up, and we met the next day. He looked haggard. He said that someone had been mailing him a copy of the article once a week for the last month. And I didn't have to ask; he confirmed that the arrested professors were the ones he'd consulted about this problem. "I don't know why they didn't include me," he said. "But I got the message. I'm through." He's still willing to talk with me about other matters, but as far as he's concerned, that inquiry is over and done with forever.

— dispatch from Doctor Primoris

On the whole, I prefer not to do extensive fieldwork on matters that are not fundamentally of my own initiation, but this mystery uncovered by Styles' friend caught my fancy. After a year and more of occasional traveling to supplement research closer to home, I can prepare a reasonably comprehensive summary.

The Inquiry takes its name from the multi-disciplinary academic force that advised President Wilson at Versailles. The first Inquiry's members sought to analyze the postwar situation as thoroughly as possible so that the diplomats could draft treaties grounded wholly in reason and evidence rather than petty vengeance. When it became clear that political powers wouldn't allow what the scholars thought of as a just, sane agreement, a handful of participants decided to act on their own. Their first targets would be their own colleagues, whom the dissenters see as traitors laying the groundwork for future wars.

That in mind, I quickly realized the overall thrust of the manipulation identified by Aramission and the others. It's aimed specifically at what a particular sort of propagandist likes to call "warmongers," those who mobilize the resources of industries and nations for war, arrange the conduct of the war, and dispose of the spoils afterward. What distinguishes this set of manipulators from their ranting, banner-waving colleagues is a certain subtlety. They are clearly willing to work entirely in the shadows and to strike at those who actually implement decisions rather than those who are merely figureheads.



I believe the Inquiry intends to keep warmaking groups in a constant state of turmoil and at a loss of relative advantage. It is possible some members would like to engage in corresponding intervention to strengthen and reward anti-war groups, but further investigation suggests there are too few participants to devote to the task. Considering the organization's overall configuration, I reasoned that recruiting new members into the Inquiry is necessarily a slow and careful task, since the group can afford no leaks.

This fact suggested to me that the manipulators might themselves come from among the ranks of their victims. Few people can work so effectively against a class as its own members, if they decide to compensate for (real or imagined) sins by acts of collective atonement. I therefore decided to begin my own investigation by going over the rosters of Versailles conference participants in search of individuals whose actions were such as to allow room for suspicion about their involvement in an anti-war conspiracy.

It took me a full season to build a roster of highly viable candidates. There were half a dozen Americans and one or more individuals each from a variety of colonial or otherwise marginalized nations: Ethiopia, India, Abyssinia, Norway and Czechoslovakia each provided four members, while Italy contributed two, and more than a dozen other nations contributed one each. I started my investigation with those listed as having passed away, knowing from close experience that a plausible death can greatly enhance one's freedom of decision... but it occurs to me that a discourse on my methods isn't precisely the point here.

Suffice it to say that I was able to identify a core constituency of individuals from eight nations who had indeed faked their deaths and a periphery of individuals from 10 nations more who, from time to time, used a variety of disguises to gain more freedom of movement. It took the rest of a year to trace their movements; the Inquiry operates entirely in secret, spending months or years studying the workings of an organization, such as a government ministry or corporate branch, then striking at the largely unseen people who occupy crucial links in the chain of command. This behavior makes them understandably difficult to track down. I did persevere, however, and having finally identified them, it was time to move.

To my lasting regret, I did something wrong. I had hoped to present myself to them as a kindred spirit. I have no use for their apparent utopianism, nor do I think warmongering in any sense a necessarily undesirable activity. But I did feel some sincere admiration for their care and cunning and felt that I could plausibly feign a sympathy of outlook that would let me infiltrate their group and perhaps even turn it to my own purposes. Instead... I spent the better part of three weeks fending off assassination attempts, and when I regained the breathing space necessary for fresh evaluation, I found that all my targets had changed their patterns of movement. I would have to begin all again over to track them down, and at this time, I don't have an interest in doing so.

A cursory review of recent data suggests that the Inquiry is lying low. I think this outcome suffices.



# ADVENTURE!

## TALES OF THE ÆON SOCIETY

THE MYSTERY OF  
VOLCANO ISLAND  
AN EXCITING STORY  
BY GREG STOLZE

10¢





# THE MYSTERY OF VOLCANO ISLAND

An Aeon Society /

## An Æon Society Adventure

— transcribed by Greg Stolze from the journals of Whitley Styles, published 1927

I never expected to confront the world's most dangerous botanist. But then again, I never expected to be in the middle of a possibly permanent thunderstorm over a volcanic island, standing inside a living house that quite possibly wanted me dead.

But perhaps I should start at the beginning.

\* \* \*

Initially, I was looking forward to our journey. Doctor Eggbert Chinswithe had invited the entire Æon Society for Gentlemen to visit his experimental botanical garden on distant Bokaniwatitanu, and we were all, I think, pleased by the offer. It was a cold winter in Chicago, and the opportunity of getting away to a Polynesian island was attractive in and of itself. Meeting the famed Dr. Chinswithe held great appeal for Dixon, Primoris, Tallon and Mercer — not only for his undeniable scientific accomplishments, but for the chance to meet (they thought) a great philanthropist and lover of humankind. Jake, Annabelle and I were less interested in his experiments with high-yield, Z-ray mutated crops and more interested in getting a bit of sun and surf. But (as Max made sure to remind us) the Hammersmith incident also started out as a polite invitation to a scientific demonstration.

It struck me as odd, I'll admit, that Dr. Chinswithe himself met us at the dock. He was a round, sunburned, sweaty man but extremely enthusiastic. He moored Jake's seaplane and greeted each guest effusively, even to the point of offering to help haul our luggage.

"Oh, that won't be necessary," Dixon assured him. "Our luggage hauls itself!"

I knew how keen Professor Dixon was for a

chance to show off his latest oil-fired miracle, and at the turn of a key, our trunks produced wheels and proceeded up the pier, one after the other, in an obedient single file line. All except for Safari Jack's portmanteau, unfortunately. Due to what was later diagnosed as a poorly oiled wheel bearing, his motor-case spun in three rapidly accelerating circles before flinging itself off the wharf. But Tallon was a dashed good sport about it.

We fished out the wayward valise and made our way up a gravel path, pausing to right Dixon's automatic suitcases when, now and again, they tipped over. He kept muttering about using treads, or possibly legs, while Chinswithe apologized over and over for not having a paved path.

"No matter," Mercer said. "Paving a road would be a waste of your time and considerable talents. What can you tell us about your work?"

"Oh, well, it's not so impressive, really. Not yet. The biggest breakthroughs have been in crop yield."

As we rounded a corner, we saw what he meant. Off in the distance were towering structures that I initially thought were some sort of tropical tree. They had something of the shape of palm trees, but where a palm trunk is naked of leaf and branch, these seemed to be covered with greenery. It was only as we neared that I could see the poles, thick as railroad ties and easily 20 feet tall, strung with wire cables as thick as a finger. But what prompted gasps from all of us were the bright red globes nestled within the winding vines.

"Surely, those can't be... tomatoes?" Jake gasped.

"Oh, yes," Chinswithe said, beaming. "Quite as large as pumpkins. You should see the wa-











sity. But I'll show them. I'll show them all! Oh, we'll see who's mad

"The one thing I don't understand," Mercer said, "is why you invited us here."

Chinswithe snickered, his face slick with sweat. "Don't you? It's quite simple, really. I need Z-rays. And according to Doctor Gröebstadler's research, the strongest reservoirs come not from 'tellurgic batteries' and 'aetheric generators,' but from human beings — particularly those present at the Hammersmith explosion! Once Veronica has absorbed *your* qualities, its growth potential will be nigh-infinite!"

"Don't do it," Dixon warned. "You'll only destroy this island and your creation."

"Do you really think I'll fall for such a patently transparent ruse?"

"No ruse. Think about the weather. Think about the *mathematics*, about thermodynamics. Contingent systems only develop spontaneous order when energy is added to them — otherwise entropy drags them down. Weather is a notoriously unruly system. What could make it predictable over your island? Z-rays."

As if to punctuate his words, a great crack of thunder smote the sky.

"Your plants are leaking Z-rays into the atmosphere, drawing storms that are torn apart and dispersed by their own violence. But you're approaching the tipping point. Any increase in Z-ray intensity could create a feedback loop in which the storm's energy only reinforces itself. You could unwittingly create a super-storm — a stable monsoon that could eventually draw in every cloud on the planet!"

"Lies!" Chinswithe lunged at Dixon and raised a glass atomizer. Annabelle and I lunged for the door, but we were too late. Eggbert pumped a spray of purple mist at the inventor, and the vines around him immediately began to swell and grow, choking the scientist into silence.

She lunged to the right. I went left. The mad botanist adjusted his bottle and fired a purple stream at me but missed. Nonetheless, at the touch of the liquid, the creepers beneath me became powerful tentacles, blindly winding around each other and anything in reach as they swelled with unnatural growth.

He'd been a fool to take his eyes off Annabelle. A throwing knife glinted in her

hand, and Chinswithe would surely have been a dead man had her eyes not flicked to Dixon's enpurpled countenance. A snap of the wrist that was hardly slower than the turn of her eyes, and the vine around his throat parted.

The thud of the knife drew Chinswithe's attention. "Damn you!" he bellowed.

Swearing at a woman was his second mistake. Taking his eyes off me was his first. Leaping above the energized tendrils, I seized a vine from the ceiling and swung both feet into the side of his head.

He dropped like a sack of bricks. Unfortunately, he landed on the glass bottle. He barely had time to scream before he, like the monkey, was fatally invaded by the blind growth of his creations.

Dixon had seized Annabelle's knife and was cutting Primoris' mighty hands free. I drew Safari Jack's boot knife and started to free him, while Annabelle set about releasing Mercer. There was no time to lose. The boiling vegetation was surging up, forward and outward, expanding massively in all directions. We barely had a chance to leap out a window before the building burst open in massive growth.

"To the plane!" Mercer shouted. "Hurry!"

"Why rush?" Tallon asked, conversing easily at a loping run.

"That plant isn't just growing *up*. I give it four minutes before its roots hit the lava!"

Safari Jack — and the rest of us — increased speed to a full sprint.

\* \* \*

Jake took the plane in a slow arc as we flew away. We could see the holocaust of lava as Chinswithe's experiments combusted. When the ash from the eruption hit the storm, it drew lightning down into what was already a hell of combustion.

"Well," Dixon muttered, "at least he died as he lived — consumed by plants!"

We all had a good laugh — all except Mercer. One by one, he fixed his gaze on each of us.

"Am I the only one who appreciates what was lost here?" he asked.

There was silence for the rest of our flight to Guam. I can't speak for the others, but I know I was thinking of a brilliant mind destroyed, a chance to end famine lost forever... and of a dim, distant figure spied through the smoke, still inexorably hoeing the soil....



# This World of Wonder

--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

Greetings, Maxwell. Thank you for an all-expenses paid trip around this fabulous globe we live on. The horrors of the past 24 years, from the South African massacres that began this century to the so-called "Great" War that killed close to nine million people, are all behind us now. We have begun a new era of hope. I believe in hope because I have seen a man fly.

Nobody knows his name or how he flies. On January 25th, 1923, I was covering the city beat for The Cleveland Press and praying that there wouldn't be too many bodies. Some mad firebug torched 10 square blocks, while his buddies tried to loot the Federal Reserve Bank. The inferno trapped fireman Jerome S. Parker on the roof of the Wexler chemical plant. His goose was cooked. But then, the man next to me fell to his knees. Tears streamed down his cheeks, and he pointed skyward. I looked up and nearly fell myself. My first thought was, "I have to go to church on Sunday." For an angel, complete with wings, swooped down out of the clouds like a Fokker biplane. Just as the floor gave way under Parker's feet, the angel snatched the fireman from the blaze's hungry jaws and gently deposited him on the ground. When he landed, I could see that this miracle was not one of Biblical lore, but of one man's genius. The wings were mechanical! The "angel" wore a heavy harness with clockwork wings. It was the most amazing thing I had ever seen. He handed the coughing fireman over to his comrades and lunged back into the heavens, mechanical wings beating furiously. I couldn't make out the flying man's features due to the soot covering him, but I saw his smile. His smile said, "Things are going to get better."





After reading the article about my search for the flying man, your "Society of Gentlemen" (and do give my regards to Miss Newfield, by the by) graciously paid my way around the world "to report on the changes the world has seen since Hammersmith's experiment." My ship recently docked in New York, and I finally have time to compile my notes and catch up on my correspondence. I include a few letters and clippings that you (and your Society) may find interesting.

I do wonder if it may be premature to attribute all of the wondrous changes of this past year to a science experiment, no matter how extraordinary. The history of mankind includes innumerable stories of heroes just like the ones now fighting on the side of right. Is Miss Newfield's ability with virtually any weapon any more outrageous than Annie Oakley's mastery of fire-arms or even Robin Hood's fabled accuracy? Are the mental powers of your "mesmerists" the same ones that Merlin wielded? Did the same energy that fills Doctor Vigorous' muscles allow Hercules and Samson to perform their heroic feats? Is this a new phenomena or perhaps an older power, now returning to the world? Is this modern science an old magic? All these questions, and so few answers.

Let us begin with what we do know.

In every country, in every corner of the world, men and women are making this world a better place. Perhaps the Great War lanced a boil in the human spirit. I have seen more hope sparkling in the human eye in these past few months than in the entirety of my life before. These hope-filled eyes peer out from behind domino masks, from under slouch hats and from amid strange equipment in secret laboratories. They tell me that, as a people, we are no longer willing to stand by and let injustices go unanswered. I would be completely remiss if I did not note that the hope of this era is also reflected in the eyes of everyday men and women. I see it in a bank officer who comes every Sunday to sweep up at a Bowery soup kitchen. I see it in a young girl who told me with all sincerity that she would be a doctor some day. I see it in an old gentleman who braved grievous personal injury to testify in court against a corrupt policeman. Sometimes I truly wonder, are these heroes the cause of the hope I see or merely the reflection of this wondrous time in which we live?

While this spark of hope for the betterment of the human species burns as bright as has perhaps ever bloomed, I do fear for this new aeon. Dark forces work night and day to snuff out the candle of hope. Some of them are bitter bastions of a long-lost era, hoping to turn back the clock to a time when they were more than they are now. Their day has passed (in some cases, by millennia), and yet, they still fight on. Were their goals not so horrific, I would have much greater respect for them. Others wish to take the great gifts of this modern world and use them for petty, selfish games. These mad scientists infuriate me, with their test tubes and their ever-present Jacob's ladders. Had they dedicated one tenth of the time they did to their latest death ray to the problems of world hunger, perhaps children would not have to go to bed without supper in so many corners of the globe. And while I have long admired the inherent goodness of everyday people, I also dread the darkness that can oh-so-easily take hold of the human heart. The difference between a madman who threatens a city with destruction and the slumlord that throws old women into the streets is merely a matter of scale.

But through it all, I still have hope of a better world.



## Bulletins From A Brave New World

— dispatch by Sarah Gettel

The ramshackle cottage was dark, but I could see a glimmer of electric light seeping between the boards of the old barn. I was out of the Packard before Wallace could kill the engine; his startled shout chased after me as I threw open the barn's side door and raced inside.

The place stank of petrol and oil, not the typical earthy smells of agriculture. The huge plane sat like a hooded hawk, eager for the sky. There were machine parts and schematics everywhere. An old, scarred desk, salvaged from the University, sat up in one corner, likewise papered with O'Malley's technical drawings. The red-bearded giant was facedown amid his plans for aeronautical conquest, snoring like a badly tuned table saw.

"Rise and shine, ace!" I called out, giving the side of the desk a solid *thump* with my boot for emphasis. "Duty calls! Let's see if this big gooney bird is half as good as you say it is."

"Huh? Whuzzat?" Britain's leading aero engineer said, picking up his shaggy head and blinking like an owl. "Sarah? What're you going on about now?"

"There's a war, brewing, Professor!" I replied. "There's been an urgent cable from Sofia—"

"Sofia? Who's she?"

"Not *who*, Professor, but *where* — Sofia, Bulgaria. There's been an incident. Bulgarian troops have crossed the Greek border. A Greek soldier has been killed. Reports from the area have been confusing — or intentionally manipulated. The League of Nations is convinced that someone has instigated the whole affair." I paused, looking him in the eye. "I suspect that fiend Count Orlan is up to his old tricks."

"Orlan!" O'Malley straightened, hearing the name of his longtime nemesis. "Why didn't you say so, lassie!" He rose from the desk as the rest of the crew bustled into the barn. "Help me get those doors open!" he called out to Wallace and Little John. The burly professor dashed for the wide barn doors. "As it happens, I've reformulated the superchargers on *Queen Mab's* engines," he called over his shoulders. "I've been eager to test them out! You want to fly, lassie? Get ready for a trip you'll never forget!"



# Rising From the Fire

--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

## Years of Empire

Six great empires dominated the world at the beginning of the century: Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. They enjoyed relative stability at home, but economic realities -- and imperial egos -- drove a tide of conquering armies to every corner of the globe. They carved out colonies from Africa, Asia and South America and ruthlessly exploited the resources they found there to line nests back home. Even the United States, once a bastion of isolationism, fell prey to the temptations of conquest, with imperial adventures in Honduras, Cuba, Nicaragua and the Philippines.

Naturally, it was only a matter of time before these great nations found themselves at war over particularly tempting pieces of real estate. Germany and France fought over Ottoman-held North Africa, and Russia went to war with Japan over Chinese Manchuria and Korea. The great powers used gunboat diplomacy and brinkmanship to negotiate, bully or outright seize territories to bolster their global power and prestige. This intense politicking produced a complex series of non-aggression pacts and defensive alliances engineered to maintain a tenuous balance of power both in Europe and among their many colonial possessions. Germany could not attack France without fighting Britain as well. Austria-Hungary could not attack Russia without automatically incurring the wrath of Britain and France; likewise, Russia could not entertain designs on the fractious Balkan states (Romania, Serbia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania) without immediately facing Austria-Hungary and Germany. Though intended to keep the peace, the increasingly convoluted alliances became like a house of cards, waiting for but a single stroke to bring the entire mass crashing down upon itself.

## The Great War

In 1914, the deadly stroke fell. Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was touring the annexed province of Bosnia in his role as Inspector General of the Army. A radical faction of Serbian soldiers, dedicated to the liberation of all Slavs from Austro-Hungarian rule, made two different attempts on the Archduke's life, both of which failed. Hours later, as the Archduke was on the way to the hospital to visit one of the officers injured in the attack, his motorcar took a wrong turn and, through outrageous fortune, crossed paths with yet another of the Serbian assassins. Caught totally by surprise, the killer nevertheless acted without hesitation and shot the Archduke and his wife, Sophie.

The death of the Archduke unleashed a firestorm of rage in Austria-Hungary, as members of the royal family cried for revenge against Serbia and accused the Serbian government of orchestrating the attack. Serbia had alliances with Russia and France, but Austria-Hungary likewise counted on support from its neighbor Germany and declared war on July 28th. Suddenly, all the markers of 14 years of diplomacy were being called due, and all the leaders of Europe found themselves on the slippery slope to disaster.



Germany, Russia and Britain struggled furiously to keep the war from widening, but conflicting desires of territorial gain and political advantage drove each country to protect its own perceived interests and gamble against the resolve of their neighbors. Germany invaded France and Russia, committing itself to a war on two fronts, and Britain, unable to see a way out of its continental obligations, reluctantly declared war on Germany.

The Ottoman Empire joined Germany and Austria-Hungary against the Allied powers, determined to defend its interests in the Balkans and the Middle East, while Italy and Japan fell into line with the Allies. Events spun furiously out of control, and millions of men were sent to front lines all across the world. A disaster of epic proportions began to unfold. "Monarchy and privilege and pride will have it out before they die -- at what a cost!" US ambassador Walter Page wrote to President Wilson on July 29th. The Great War had begun.

Incredibly, the warring nations exulted in the early days of the war, gripped with nationalistic fervor and a sense of duty and patriotism, welcoming the conflict as a chance for adventure and glory. No one reckoned on the horrible weapons brought to bear on the field of battle: massed artillery, machine guns -- and within a year, poison gas. The fields of France and Eastern Europe became charnel houses, where generals hurled their troops across churned wastelands and counted their victories in mere yards. Within a year, the conflict bogged down into near-static trench warfare which consumed lives at a staggering rate.

Something besides those many soldiers died on the battlefields of the Great War. Western civilization as a whole lost its innocence and blind devotion to the wisdom of hereditary rulers. No one alive today escaped the touch of the War to End All Wars, either as a survivor or as someone who lost family and friends in that awful struggle. The sheer brutality of the war and the even more terrifying stubbornness of the rival powers in the face of sanity or reason showed us the very worst humanity had to offer. The seeds of the modern era were planted in those dark times, as men and women found the courage to question the wisdom of the old order.

The Great War ground on for four terrible years, the deadlock in the trenches broken only after the United States entered the struggle on the Allied side. American troops and the mobile armored fortress known simply as the "tank" allowed the Allies to defeat the exhausted Central Powers at last. The cost in lives and materiel was staggering -- literally millions of lives were lost, and the great powers were reduced to mere shadows of their former glory. The Russian Empire suffered worst of all: In 1917, its people, weary of defeats and starved past the point of endurance, revolted against the Tsar, their hereditary leader. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, also known as Lenin, led the Bolshevik movement to power in his guise as a "man of the people."

## Armistice and Upheaval

The surviving leaders of the Allied Powers resolved that the world should never again suffer the nightmare of modern warfare. Following the lead of US President Woodrow Wilson, the Allies



created a League of Nations to mediate conflicts between nations and deter acts of aggression. (Ironically, the US Congress then refused to endorse the League.) At the same time, the leaders of the Allied Powers drafted sweeping diplomatic agreements to disarm Germany and break up the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, so that they could no longer foment aggression. The Versailles Treaty of 1919 (and its less-famous companion treaties) stripped Germany of nearly a third of its industrial power and all of its overseas colonies and forced the defeated empire into adopting a democratically elected government. Never before had an alliance of nations made such sweeping changes to the political landscape, and they set loose unforeseen changes in every segment of society.

The imperial powers' overweening ambitions and demonstrated disregard for their losses during the war fostered an inevitable backlash. Common men and women had learned the hard way not to blindly trust in hereditary leaders and hoary traditions, and after the horror of the war, they found the courage to face nearly any challenge head-on. Socialism gained new strength in the face of the capitalist institutions of Europe, and the Bolsheviks' success in Russia gave the governments of the world just cause to be concerned. Indeed, Lenin wasted no time pressing the cause of the People's Revolution wherever an opportunity could be found, and the last six years have seen numerous, bloody uprisings in Germany, Austria, Hungary and elsewhere.

These modern times give more cause for hope and optimism than ever before. Art and literature flourish, as bold souls question established mores and find new ways to celebrate the human condition. World industry, once marshaled for war, now uses the techniques of mass production, refined during the war years, to produce cheaper, faster and better products to ease people's lives. New technologies push back the frontiers of science, philosophy and even religion. It is a time when a single individual, with courage and strong character, can roll up his sleeves and make a mark upon the world.

## The Era of the Uncommon Man

Today we live in a period characterized as much by exceptional individuals as governments -- people of courage and vision who apply the best aspects of science and philosophy to make a better life for those around them. As a race, we gained courage from the terrors of the Great War and are willing to apply our virtues for the common good.

Not all change is good, to be sure; the rise of fascism in Italy and the brutal Spanish rule in North Africa are prime examples. And change is not welcome in every culture -- there are parts of the world today where people not only turn a wistful eye to the simpler, prouder past, but in some cases, they actively struggle to bring about its return. It is an era of tremendous possibility and potential peril, for the ascendancy of the individual is double-edged. Each man and woman is responsible for the deeds they do and the works they create, and great ability carries with it the risk of temptation.

Nevertheless, it's an exciting time to live in and a world more full of adventure than ever before.



# Europe

—dispatch by Sarah Gettel

"We're gonna get plugged," Moriarty moaned, looking up at the brightly lit manor like a 10-year-old facing his first haunted house. "Those palookas are gonna take one look at us and fill us full of lead." He turned and looked at me, his big, blue eyes wide and pleading from a boyish, freckled face. "C'mon, Sarah, do I look like a German count to you? Why can't Wallace do it?" Moriarty jerked his head at Wallace, busily negotiating our borrowed Daimler along the twisting road. "He looks German."

"Wallace can't do it because Count Luden saw him in Rome," I said, eyeing the manor house and counting the number of sedans already parked in the spacious drive. "Now is not the time to turn yellow on me, Abe. If we don't find out where Luden and the Thule Society hid that bomber prototype, London is finished." Wallace pulled the Daimler smoothly to a stop in front of the grand entryway. Two burly men in archaic livery stepped forward to welcome us, their suspicious stares peering into every shadowy corner of the car.

I turned to Moriarty. "Remember your cover. Your war wound. You don't have to say a word," I whispered, just as Wallace emerged from the car and gave the lead steward our forged invitation. The second steward extended his hand to me and helped me from the car as his companion read the calling card. "Count and Countess von Weinhopf," he said and performed a sharp, heel-clicking German bow. "Welcome, my Lord. If you will please follow me."

# Britain

Britain remains one of the most powerful nations on Earth, despite its hideous wartime losses. Once the United States' Senate refused to ratify America's membership in the League of Nations, Britain took the lead in the nascent organization, working tirelessly to further the interests of peace and stability throughout Europe. British agents and diplomats are at the forefront of mediations from German war reparations to border conflicts in the Balkans. They're not all wonderful people, but many of them strive to put the best interests of the continent ahead of the agendas of individual countries.

Britain says that the punishing terms of surrender orchestrated at Versailles may well create a desperate, antagonistic nation out of Germany, instead of a future European ally. Therefore, the British, working with the determined American civilians Charles Dawes and Owen Young, hammered out a proposal whereby Germany could still make its reparations without ruining itself in the process. Though the Dawes Plan was accepted by the League signatories, it did little to mollify the French Premier Poincare, who (like many in his generation) has little desire to see a revitalized Germany. In addition to providing skilled diplomats and investigators for the League of Nations, Britain



has also reportedly formed a small bureau attached to the Admiralty that is dedicated to acquiring intelligence information about potential threats to the country's security. This "secret service," the first of its kind, is reputed to be headquartered somewhere in London.

Of all the European countries, Britain remains the most outwardly conservative, though there was postwar social unrest in London just like elsewhere. Disputes over worker's rights and a grassroots socialist movement led to the foundation of the Labour Party, which garnered enough popular support in 1924 to briefly elect Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister as well as Foreign Secretary. The Labour government fell within months over the "Zinoviev Letter," a document indirectly linking MacDonald with the British Communist Party, leaked to the press and trumpeted widely. As a result, a conservative government was elected, though the Zinoviev Letter later proved a fraud. The Conservative Party managers supposedly paid a considerable sum to the men who'd "discovered" it in the first place. The incident showed just how much influence the press now wields in shaping public opinion and how powerful a tool it is for manipulators. The recent political strife between the Labour and Conservative Parties has also engendered a small but significant amount of sympathy among the upper classes for the brand of quasi-fascist national socialism advocated by Adolf Hitler in Germany.

The sciences and technology flourish in Britain. John Baird, a Scottish engineer, successfully demonstrated the transmission of crude images via electronic emission in London, advancing development of what some engineers call "television." Another exciting development is the production of a series of lightweight airplanes by the DeHavilland Corporation. Called the DeHavilland Moth, this design utilizes proprietary engineering and construction techniques to provide greater speed and longer range than hitherto possible. Naturally, this news has attracted aviation enthusiasts -- and aspiring test pilots -- from across Europe and even as far as America, but DeHavilland worries about the potential for a competitor to try and sneak a look at its designs.

London remains the cultural and political center of Britain and is the financial nerve center for the whole of Europe, with Lloyd's of London insuring the vast majority of the world's international shipments. The great insurer has a veritable legion of investigators and security specialists on retainer to both protect vital cargoes and track down the ruffians responsible for any theft. The city is also well known for its theater district, entertaining citizens and foreign dignitaries with everything from Shakespeare to Douglas Fairbank's *The Thief of Bagdad*. Another, less well-known institution has also gained a renewed lease on life in the new climate of global exploration. The Explorer's Club, a Victorian organization originally founded by gentleman adventurers in the previous century, maintains a quiet presence in the city just off Grosvenor Square. Its current president, Sir John Rhyburton, maintains many of the club's traditions, including locating financial support for promising expeditions of clear scientific value, but in addition, has taken the progressive stance of opening the club's doors to aspiring female members.



## France

No less venerable a state than Britain, France has had less success with its overseas colonies, and its lengthy -- and costly -- campaigns against the former Ottoman Empire in North Africa at the turn of the century were not as profitable as the French had hoped. France suffered the most of any of the Allies during the Great War and remains a staunch opponent of German reconstruction.

When Germany recently announced that it would be forced to default on its war reparations, France and Belgium sent troops to occupy the Ruhr Valley, seizing the coal mines so vital to German industry. Poincare vowed to keep troops in the region "for a thousand years" until Germany relented and found a way to pay its debt. The standoff was only averted with implementation of the Dawes Plan, though there are still French and Belgian troops occupying the area, continuing to exacerbate tensions. In addition, it is well known that the French government actively supports a separatist movement among the peoples of Germany's Rhineland, providing both financial support and protection from retaliation by hindering the efforts of the German police in the region.

Despite the titular protection of the League of Nations and the Geneva Protocols banning warfare, the French government recently sought additional protection from Germany in the form of a mutual defense pact with Britain. Germany was naturally outraged upon learning of the French efforts, likening them to a return to the disastrous web of alliances that brought about the Great War. Surprisingly, support for the German position came from the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, who argued that such an alliance could serve no purpose other than to make a war between Germany and France inevitable. Churchill's arguments were successful in sidelining the treaty, but the initiative could be revisited in the future, something that concerns both British and German diplomats.

France's economy suffered heavily after the war, and the country remains stricken. Favorable exchange rates with the

*-from the clippings of the AEon Society*

### Mechanical Serpent Consumes Paris Opera Diva

The Paris Opera house has been closed for the past week while investigators pursue the enormous serpent, 50 feet long and made of some bulletproof metal, that burst out from under the stage during a production of *Don Giovanni*. The serpent blew gouts of steam out of its nostrils, scattering the actors and panicking the crowd. It opened up its enormous mouth and swallowed Vivian Coubertain, playing the part of Donna Anna. After consuming the diva, the snake retracted its head back into the ground. Police report that the snake traveled via the Paris sewers. The mechanical snake has not been seen since the incident.

A statement by the family of Mme. Coubertain says that the family is willing to pay any price to get its daughter back, though no ransom demands have been made as yet.

*Step up investigations of the Undercity.  
-Hephaestia? But why?*



United States brought in a veritable wave of expatriates from America, either on the run from a shady past or simply seeking to escape the oppressive fundamentalism back home. Paris is a sanctuary for American artists, writers and entertainers, from Ernest Hemingway to Isadora Duncan, and the City of Lights is a bohemian wonderland of avant-garde theater, risqu cabarets and poet-haunted cafes. On a darker note, the city famous for the Louvre is also a haven for art and jewel thieves, as economic woes sustain a thriving black market for stolen and smuggled goods. Private investigators and the French gendarmes play a lively cat-and-mouse game with the underworld.

## Germany

After imposing a democratically elected government onto the former empire, the Allies left Germany to fend for itself. Several German states suffered violent attempts at secession and communist-inspired revolution. These uprisings were often brutally put down by groups of volunteer soldiers organized into freikorps, without official standing and acting as vigilante groups, performing summary executions of suspected dissidents. Wars of terror raged on the streets of Munich and Berlin. Amid this atmosphere of unrest, the average German citizen suffered through frequent famine and a crippling economic depression brought on by the burden of war reparations.

Now, however, things show signs of turning around, thanks in part to the Dawes Plan and sheer, dogged determination. With its war debt settled to a manageable level, Germans are experiencing some return to prosperity, and the dissident groups that have plagued German society have been either eliminated or driven underground. There's still potential for unrest: The National Socialist Party is still strong amid the streets of Munich, and its leader, Adolf Hitler, has recently been freed from a brief stay in prison following the abortive "Beer Hall Putsch" of 1923. Worse yet, the racist secret organization known as the Thule Society still lingers among the remnants of German aristocracy, helping to foment the rabid anti-Semitism sweeping the country and harboring designs for a resurgent German Empire.

But there are many signs of hope. Germany has been welcomed as an equal voice in mediations brought forward in the League of Nations. Its image as "the Hun," the great enemy, has finally subsided, and Germany is once again seen as a respected member of the European community. Berlin has developed a vibrant -- and scandalous -- night life, as entertainers push the limits of expression in search of new and provocative experiences. Classical music and opera thrive as well, and the motion picture industry in Berlin is second only to Hollywood in its artistic talent and sophistication.

Germany truly shines in the field of science. Physicists such as the eminent Albert Einstein and Werner Heisenberg lead the field in the study of the fundamental nature of the universe. Hermann Oberth, author of last year's The Rocket into Interplanetary Space, is likewise developing principles of rocket science that may one day allow men to travel to other planets. These and other learned scientists attract the interests of industrialists from around the world, who hope to find practical applications for their revolutionary theories. If Germany's fledgling democ-



racy can be safeguarded a few years longer, there is every possibility that it will become a widely esteemed force for progress and prosperity worldwide.

## Italy

Italy was unified under the House of Savoy in 1870 and entered the 20th century as a constitutional monarchy with grand ambitions of becoming an imperial power. Efforts at empire building in Ethiopia in the 1880s and '90s ended in the slaughter and withdrawal of Italian troops, and industrialization at home brought the same mix of general prosperity and deepening misery among some classes that was already familiar to other European powers. Political reform proceeded erratically. The government spent the first year of the Great War conducting secret diplomacy with both sides, in search of the best deal. Once the Allies came through with an appealing offer, Italian troops marched to battle... and into a series of crushing defeats. Successive administrations tried different strategies, but the army achieved no significant victories until the very last days of the war.

The Versailles negotiations granted Italy its desired claims along its northern border, territories that had belonged to Austria, but Italy did not get the lands it sought along the Adriatic coast of the Balkans. Private armies mounted illegal campaigns of their own to secure what they felt Italy "deserved," and the last of them fought on for two full years after the war officially ended. With a huge wartime debt and more than half a million dead soldiers to show for their effort, many Italians felt that their country's gains had scarcely been worth the price.

Frustrated on all sides, Italy was consumed by social unrest and economic depression. The political process broke down further, with the powerful Socialist Party at odds with a breakaway Communist faction and a bitter right-wing Christian Democratic Party. As the country teetered on the edge of anarchy, Benito Mussolini, a war veteran and the son of a blacksmith, saw his opportunity. Though ill-educated and politically inexperienced, Mussolini nevertheless understood one thing clearly: the application of violence.

Mussolini gathered bands of former veterans into paramilitary groups known as the Black Shirts, whose job was to disrupt the socialist political organization through threats, arson and murder. By 1921, Mussolini claimed 300,000 members in his Fascist Party and grew so bold as to send his Black Shirts marching on Rome itself. By intimidating or eliminating any opposition, his party won a majority in last year's elections, establishing Mussolini as the ruling power in the country. Though the country is still ostensibly ruled by King Victor Emmanuel III of the House of Savoy, the monarch is nothing more than a puppet in the hands of Mussolini and his thugs.

Despite his reprehensible and barbaric tactics, Mussolini nevertheless enjoys a certain amount of popularity among upper- and middle-class Italians, many of whom regard him as a patriot and the answer to their nationalistic ambitions. The fact remains, however, that the fascists rule by terror and crush any attempt at democracy through the ruthless application of violence. If the fascists are allowed to continue their rampage unchecked, the future of the country looks bleak indeed.



## Spain

Spain, like Italy, once entertained dreams of becoming an imperial power, but a combination of internal upheaval and military setbacks turned hope into misfortune.

At the turn of the century, Spain made an earnest attempt to modernize its government into a more democratic, constitutional monarchy. The landed aristocracy was still a powerful force to be reckoned with and supported the twin causes of Catholicism and monarchism. The middle and lower classes embraced socialism and republicanism and were gaining strength year by year as the country grew more industrialized. Unfortunately, the country's monarch, King Alfonso XIII, was too young and inexperienced to bridge the differences between the factions or build an effective coalition government.

Spain suffered a series of military defeats: first, the Spanish-American War of the late 19th century, then, a long and bloody occupation of Morocco that turned into a costly guerilla war. Though Spain had wisely chosen to remain neutral during the Great War, the constant losses of the Moroccan conflict left the king unpopular with both the army and the populace. Last September, Miguel Primo de Rivera, a popular general who served in Morocco and a prominent senator, orchestrated a military coup and placed a directorate of army and navy commanders in control of the government. Though King Alfonso remains on the throne, he is little more than a figurehead.

Primo de Rivera now attempts to play the part of the benevolent despot, forcing the divided political factions into some semblance of unity. All the while, resentment and unrest simmer among the aristocrats, who wish to see King Alfonso restored to his rightful authority. These wealthy Spaniards despair of appealing to the populace for support and now attempt to drum up aid among sympathetic souls in Europe and America, convincing them to take up arms and fight a romantic crusade against the usurper.

from the correspondence of Sarah Gettel

Miss Gettel,

*You have often asked me to keep my ears open for interesting and unusual information. I am en route to Portocelo, Spain to do a little digging of my own. A fisherman acquaintance of mine, after a few bottles of wine, told me stories of spotting mermaids off of the coast of Portocelo. Though I was drinking at the time as well, I do recall enough of the story to be intrigued. My friend, who wishes to remain anonymous, told me that, one calm spring day, while working on a fishing boat owned by the Distollo family, he actually saw a mermaid. He said she was inhumanly beautiful, like the sirens of old. Though her lips did not move, he heard in his head that he should jump overboard and join her in the fathoms below. As he climbed over the rail, another crewman saw him and pulled him back. A fight broke out, and my friend lost his job as a result. He spent weeks in a borrowed boat, searching for his aquatic love, but never found her.*

*I have chartered a small boat and will attempt to return with a photograph of this mermaid.*

Dr. Phillip Snow

addendum by Whitley Styles

*Distollo fisherman found Doctor Snow's boat, anchored off the coast of Portocelo and empty as the Maria Celeste. One of the Distollo fisherman reported an odd smell on the boat, though he could not describe it exactly. Other men in Portocelo are reported as missing.*



# Bolshevik Russia and Eastern Europe

—dispatch by Sarah Gettel

We stood in the freezing darkness and listened for the approaching trucks. Once again, I wished I'd taken O'Malley up on his offer to try his prototype electro-thermal coveralls. Our breath hung like crystal in the moonlight. I checked my watch for the 10th time in as many minutes. The Bolshevik secret police were normally deathly punctual.

"They are not coming," Irina said darkly. Looking at her, I realized I had little reason to complain. She was dressed literally in rags but seemed not to notice the winter chill. Wallace had said she'd once been a baroness. Now, she seemed too old for her 18 years, a worn-down woman with nothing left but memories. Memories and a steely determination to live those days once more.

"Don't give up yet," I said, as much to reassure her as myself. "Anything might have happened. A tree might have fallen across the road. They'll be along. And then, we'll set your father free."

Irina smiled and moved off to stand at the curve of the road, looking for headlights.

Moriarty stepped out from the shadows. "Do you really think the old man knows where the Grand Duchess is hidden?"

I shrugged. "Who knows? Honestly, it doesn't matter. Look at her," I said, nodding to Irina. "Her father is all she has left. She never asked to be who she is and never did anything to the Bolsheviks. We can get her and her father out of the country. That's worth the price of admission all by itself."

Moriarty scowled. "Yeah, well, you better hope that O'Malley's sonic rifle works as advertised, or I guarantee, we're gonna get a much bigger show than either of us bargained for."

Just then, we heard the sound of the engines.

## Russia

The Allies did their best to strangle the Soviet Union in its cradle. Britain, France, America and Japan all lent as much manpower and materiel as their war-weary nations would allow to pro-tsarist revolts from 1917 to late 1918. Russia had already lost Poland, the Ukraine, Finland and the Baltic provinces to the Germans in 1917; so-called "White Russian" armies drove toward Moscow from all directions, their supply lines protected by foreign militaries. Fortunately for the communist leaders, the end of the Great War left the battle-weary Allies with little choice but to pull back their forces and let the White Russian armies founder on their own. The leaders of each of the pro-tsarist armies had their own agendas, and with victory in sight, they turned upon one another in the struggle to see who would divide up the spoils. Lenin and the revolutionary leaders used the grace period to call up more troops and drive a wedge between their enemies, then defeat them one at a time. In 1920, the Polish attacked the Ukraine, then an independent White Russian republic, and gave the Red Army the excuse to counterattack, not only retaking the province but pushing some 300 miles into eastern Poland. Later that year, the last White Russian army was defeated in the Crimea, and the future of the Bolshevik government was assured.



The force behind the miraculous survival of the Bolsheviks rested in the genius and charisma of one man -- Lenin. After returning from exile in 1917, Lenin and his deputies Trotsky and Stalin stole power from the provisional government established upon the Tsar's overthrow. With mixed ruthlessness and zeal, they guided the backward nation through the chaos of socialist reorganization. In 1919, Lenin established the Comintern, a bureau dedicated to spreading the cause of revolution abroad. Soon, there were embryonic Communist Parties in every industrialized nation in the world, though their success was somewhat limited. At the same time, Lenin and his cronies were eliminating potential rivals at home; by 1921, their control of the country was absolute.

Tensions between Lenin and his lieutenants grew as soon as they had solidified their power. Trotsky and Stalin bickered and schemed against one another, positioning themselves as heirs-apparent to the Bolshevik regime. They did not have long to wait. In 1922, Lenin had the first of three strokes. As his health declined, Lenin began seriously considering choosing a successor to lead the party. It appears that the long-time schemer could not bring himself to trust either man with the position. Trotsky, he wrote, was "too clever" and Stalin "too self-centered" to properly lead the party. Lenin even went so far as to lay plans to have Stalin removed from his post as the party's General Secretary, but before they could be put into action, he suffered two more strokes and died in January of last year.

Trotsky and Stalin continue to fight for control of the Communist Party. Trotsky is clearly the more brilliant of the two men and an outspoken advocate of the "universal Communist revolution." As General Secretary, Stalin commands the support of countless party loyalists. Unlike Trotsky, Stalin believes that the world can survive with only one Communist regime and favors pulling back from the European scene. Stalin had enough political support to force Trotsky to resign his position as Commissar of War and did so just a few months ago. Though he still retains his post on the all-powerful Politburo, Trotsky is clearly being methodically stripped of his influence, and many suspect that it is just a matter of time before he is too weak to avoid arrest and execution at the hands of the Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka.

Stalin's public willingness to isolate the new Soviet Union from the rest of Europe was crucial in winning acknowledgement from Britain and France this year. Now no longer a rogue power, the Soviet Union is ruthlessly driven to modernize its economy and industry in search of world-class power.

Despite the Soviet Union's recent successes, its future remains unclear. The challenges involved with economic revitalization and winning foreign investment seem insurmountable without outrageously draconian measures. There is also the question of internal dissent; the country's long-suffering peasant farmers must do much of the work ahead. Additionally, despite the military failures of several years ago, there are still groups of White Russians operating in secret in the republics of Georgia and the Ukraine. Rumor also says that one or more of the Tsar's children, possibly even the heir Alexis, might have escaped their murderers, and it has even gained some credence among the aristocratic families of Europe. There are still idealistic adventurers in Europe and elsewhere who fought with the White Russians years ago and might be persuaded to again if a charismatic figure stepped forward to take up the cause.



## Eastern Europe

Allied diplomats, under Woodrow Wilson's well-intentioned but naive direction, split Austria and Hungary into two nations and established Poland as an independent country. The creation of the Polish state not only fulfilled long-cherished dreams of Polish independence, it also deprived Germany of vital mineral supplies along with its only major sea port, the city of Danzig. The loss outraged the Germans and left large numbers of former German citizens part of a country they wanted nothing to do with.

The situation in the Balkans was problematical from the start. For centuries the Slovak peoples of the peninsula were ruled by foreign conquerors: the Muslims, the Magyars of Hungary and, in recent times, the combined empire of Austria-Hungary. There was a groundswell of support for a unified Slovak nation after the war but no clear geographical divisions upon which to base such a state. The Versailles negotiators decided to integrate the former Austro-Hungarian provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and, a year later, Ruthenia into a single state, known as Czechoslovakia. Additionally, a nation comprising the "south Slavs," the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was formed from the former countries of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While elegant on paper, these solutions did not address the individual cultures, religions and languages of the integrated peoples, many of whom had nothing more in common than shared history from centuries past. Almost immediately, tensions flared in the young nation, with Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro all seeking independence. The Allies had promised territory in the northern Kingdom to the Italian government during the war and were partially reneging on their agreement, adding one more dissatisfied nation to the turmoil.

The conflicting ethnic agendas of the integrated Slovak countries keep their governments in perpetual contention. Parliamentary meetings quickly devolve into shouting matches, and governments seem to change hands from month to month. Only fear of ambitious neighbors keeps either nation intact. Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland and Italy make no bones about their desire to carve up the Slovak countries like a Christmas goose, despite intense pressure from the League. Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Romania entered into a mutual defensive pact in 1920, frequently referred to as the Little Entente, which has so far managed to maintain a tenuous balance of power in the region. But with the day-to-day uncertainties of the Balkan governments, there is no guarantee how long this umbrella of safety can last.

Eastern Europe and the Balkans remain concerns to the League and its constituents, as the region is so volatile that any individual with enough charisma and a sufficiently ruthless agenda can play upon the local politics to carve out a renegade state of his own. The territorial aims of Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria invite the very real possibility of war, requiring little more than a handful of dedicated agents provocateurs to touch off a terrible conflagration, one that could not help but draw the opportunistic eye of the Bolsheviks.



*from the clippings of the Æon Society*

## Minotaur Spotted on Crete

Alexander Rosenberg, a German tourist visiting Crete, claims he was attacked by the mythical minotaur of Greek mythology. While touring the ruins, Rosenberg became separated from his group. He claims to have fallen into a heretofore-undiscovered labyrinth. While lost in the underground maze, the mythical minotaur chased him. He claims then to have tripped over a golden thread, which led him out of the maze. He has proven unable to lead archeologists back to the maze entrance.

*We have his photographs. Dixon says they haven't been doctored.*

-WS

## The Americas

*—dispatch by Sarah Gettel*

Heavy flakes of snow fell steadily through the holes in the old warehouse's roof, dusting the dirty wooden floors and eddying around the heels of the technicians as they hurried about their tasks. No one had bothered to light a fire in the building's cobwebbed furnace; Tesla maintained that the cold was beneficial to electrical conductivity, but I wondered if he was simply too poor to afford a bucket of coal.

The cavernous space was dominated by a tower of metal not dissimilar to Nikola Tesla's famous Tesla coil — a circle of vertical steel rods supported dozens of broad metal disks, its diameter as large as a sitting-parlor. A veritable snake's nest of thick, black cables festooned the outside of the tall coil, carefully attached to the wide disks by Tesla's assistants, who meticulously calibrated each and every connection under the master's watchful eye. The cables ran back to a large metal box, covered in switches and dials, that Tesla called his "telluric induction generator." Somehow, the device would draw power out the air itself and, when the time was right, pump two million volts into the tower standing before us. He'd tried to explain the process twice already, but it all sounded like Greek to me. I was much more curious about who the inventor's mysterious new financial backer was. The last time it had been the German government, in the years just before the war. They'd had great success with the turbines he'd designed for them, much to the Allies' regret.

"Yes, yes! Excellent!" the inventor enthused, looking up through the center of the coil and beaming with satisfaction. Tesla was lean and energetic, despite his age, dapper, despite his slightly disheveled appearance. "The connections must be made just so — *just so* — to focus the etheric flux." He clapped his hands together eagerly and dashed to his telluric generator. Tesla fished a pocket watch from his vest and scrutinized it carefully. "Timing is critical," he said, to no one in particular. The inventor looked my way. "Timing is *everything*, Miss Gettel. Why Einstein could not grasp this, I shall never know."

The technicians moved away from the coil. Three of them ducked out one of the open doorways, back in the direction of our parked automobiles. "Are we going to start without your patron, Mister Tesla?" I said with a frown. This wasn't what Special Agent Dawson led me to believe.



Tesla put away his watch and started flipping switches. A faint smile played across his face. "My patron prefers results, Miss Gettel. As yet, there is nothing here for him to see." He paused, checking the dials a final time, then with a flourish, his fingers threw a final switch at the end of the console, and the box began to emit an unearthly hum.

I was expecting a display of lightning and sharp cracks of artificial thunder, but Tesla's coil merely began to glow, filling the warehouse with an otherworldly blue light. Movement at the doorway caught my eye, and I saw the three technicians returning from outside, lugging a number of heavily laden packs. I glanced curiously at the inventor. "What are those for?"

Once again, Tesla smiled. "My patron desires direct evidence that there are other worlds parallel to our own, and I mean to give it to him." He pointed at the coil. "In a few moments, we will step through the resonator into a world both like and unlike our own and return with proof that my theories were correct!"

Gooseflesh raced along my arms. "We?" I asked, suddenly very uneasy.

Tesla's smile grew bemused. "Well, certainly," he replied. "I need *someone* to compose a journal of our experiences. Why else do you think I agreed to your visit?"

The glow grew brighter inside the coil. The air was shimmering, like the liquid haze that ripples over desert sands. Beyond the haze, I could see tall trees — and indistinct figures, staring back at me.





## The United States

The Great War proved an ironic godsend for America, generating a booming economy and tremendous industrial growth. Mass production, long an American science, was perfected through the rigid demands of wartime quotas. Now, those well-learned lessons help businesses turn out cheap, quality products in great demand in Europe and elsewhere. The United States emerged from the war as the leading creditor to many of the Allied nations, having provided the staggering sum of 10 billion dollars in wartime loans to keep countries such as Britain, France and tsarist Russia in the fight. After the war, this translated into a windfall of political clout among the European giants. Almost literally overnight, the young nation vaulted into the role of a major power and a leader in international affairs.

Young, upstart America embodies the hope and enthusiasm fueling the modern era. The industrial sector is growing at a phenomenal rate, with newer and more efficient means of production introduced every month. Inventors thrive amid this change and innovation, flocking to giant corporations such as General Electric and Westinghouse, who have the manufacturing might to tackle even the most challenging projects. Anything seems possible with the right mixture of money, brains and grit.

Automobile companies such as Ford and rival General Motors turn out automobiles at a dizzying rate, giving modern Americans the ability to seek employment and entertainment far from their homes. Automobiles are becoming such a fixture of American life that entrepreneur John Hertz recently acquired an ambitious company allowing citizens of average means to lease motorcars for long trips across country.

For the wealthy, aviation provides a far better means to travel quickly between cities in moderate comfort and style. Meanwhile, scientists such as Robert Goddard pursue the science of rocketry, hinting that one day soon humankind may be flying higher, faster and farther than even Jules Verne thought possible.

Like their British cousins, who held up science and reason as the watchword of the last century, American inventors, from Vannevar Bush to the visionary and eccentric Nikola Tesla, are using physics and electricity to explore and manipulate the fundamental forces of life itself. In the Sargasso Sea, that infamous graveyard of lost ships, the New York Zoological Society's Beebe Expedition is dredging the primordial depths for buried treasure of the biological variety: fish, octopi and a multitude of other organisms indigenous to the sea floor. Superstition, especially the fascination in the occult so popular in the early part of the century, is being pushed back by the pure light of reason. Even Harry Houdini, the famous escape artist and former mystic, is busy touring the country and publicly debunking so-called "occult phenomena"!

The economic boom made America a millionaire's paradise. Established families such as the Morgans and the Vanderbilts and the nouveau riche alike flaunt their prosperity with lavish parties whose excesses would beggar the royalty of old. The influx of wealth has left many individuals and families with, quite frankly, more money than they know what to do with. Some squander their provenance; others, such as young millionaire Howard Hughes, use their fortunes to pursue whatever area of interest



catches their fancy. Currently the 18-year-old Hughes is in Texas, running his late father's drilling company, but many speculate that he will soon grow bored and find something else to occupy his prodigious intellect, possibly racing or aviation.

Happily, many wealthy individuals in the United States realize that great wealth offers great opportunity, not just for individuals, but for all mankind. There are visionaries and philanthropists pleased to finance worthy endeavors, from scientific explorations to medical research to revolutionary (and some say, crackpot) inventions. Certainly, some of these worthy efforts fail; sometimes a well-meaning tycoon finds himself fleeced by a smooth-talking confidence man. But here and there, real progress is made, at universities, private labs and converted basements all across the nation.

The rapid advance of technology has even found its way into the sphere of entertainment. Nearly every American household now boasts a radio in their parlor, where the family can gather to hear news and entertainment in the comfort of its own home.

For pure enjoyment, nothing beats the fun of a night at the cinema, and Hollywood, California, is now the world leader in film production, with giants such as Warner Brothers, Universal and MGM producing films for audiences across the globe. A new sort of celebrity, the movie star, captures the hearts of the working class, from romantic leads such as Rudolph Valentino and Lillian Gish to that loveable scamp Charlie Chaplin. As the popularity of the cinema increases, movie companies send talent scouts and producers far and wide in search of new talent and interesting subjects to entertain audiences. Additionally, it seems like any endeavor worth attempting is now worth the attentions of a movie crew: Cameramen and directors make their way into everything from mountain-climbing expeditions to dangerous treks into the heart of darkest Africa.

This is not to say that the cinema is the end-all of modern entertainment. Theatre and music thrive in New York. Broadway houses play everything from vaudeville and the Ziegfeld Follies to Arms and the Man. The biggest musical sensation sweeping the nation is steamy, scandalous jazz. Led by greats such as Al Jolson, "Bix" Beiderbecke, Louis Armstrong and George Gershwin, jazz music has taken the world by storm with its exuberance and mischievous, some say immoral, earthiness. Nevertheless, art is a reflection of life, and what better sound for our changing times than jazz?

Not every aspect of growth and change is for the good. America faces a crisis of character and conscience. Reactionary fundamentalism drives religious leaders and politicians to rail against perceived threats to public morality, whether from old vices such as liquor or the disturbing assertions of science. The Volstead Act of 1919 made the sale and manufacture of alcohol illegal, but prohibition has created an entire criminal industry. Average citizens slip out each night to speak-easies, where knowing the right password or passing over the right amount of money allows admittance to a smoky basement in which bathtub gin is served. Gangsters rule by terror and violence in cities such as Chicago and New York, corrupting politicians and policemen in the pursuit of their bootlegging, and strangely, they have become celebrities of a sort for defying the government's moralistic stand.



Meanwhile, in the state of Tennessee, Governor Austin Peay signed a bill into law that made it illegal for any state-financed school or university to teach any theory that denies the divine order of creation as expressed in the Bible. Already, this has led to the arrest of one man, John T. Scopes, who is now on trial for teaching the theory of evolution to his students. The trial quickly became a media sensation; at the heart of it lies America's unease with the headlong process of progress and change that is shaking up every aspect of its society.

For all the wealth flowing into the country, the disparity between rich and poor in the United States has never been greater, with immigrant families living in conditions more reminiscent of the Middle Ages than the modern age. The resurgence of isolationism in the wake of the Great War has added fuel to the rampant discrimination of Asian immigrants on the West Coast. Just this year, Congress passed the Immigration Act to bar all Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Indian immigrants, deny them citizenship and naturalization and forbid them from marrying Caucasians or owning land.

Racism continues to bedevil American society. Negroes still do not share even the basic civil rights enjoyed by white citizens, and the crusade for equality and respect meets with resistance at every turn. The Ku Klux Klan has redoubled its efforts, particularly in the Midwest and Pacific Northwest states, to pursue its racist agenda through outright terrorism and murder. For all its achievements, the United States still has demons of its own to face and needs brave souls to steer its course through the turbulent times ahead. Fortunately, there is no lack of worthy individuals ready to take up the banner of progress and lead the way to a brighter future for all Americans, regardless of age, station or color.

### *—from the journals of Sarah Gettel*

*My trip to San Jose left me both sad and horrified. My dear old friend, Sarah Winchester, had passed on recently. In 1919, I attended a quite chilling séance there. I hoped that, with her passing, the spirits who tormented her in life would leave her be. Having no heirs, the city assumed the property, though they have not yet found a use for it. I took it upon myself to visit the house one last time and drink a toast to my departed friend. The locks were enough to keep out the riff raff, but I easily slipped them.*

*I should never have gone in. Not alone, and not after dark. The old Victorian mansion chilled the summer air to the point where I could see my breath. I should have known better than to go into a haunted house after dark. On the other hand, it was a story.*

*The house did not appreciate my appearance. The cold air was its first warning. Doors that locked themselves was the second. Soon, I found myself running for my life down a corridor that stretched on forever. I could hear Sarah crying out in pain. The thousands of men killed by her father-in-law's rifle had not let her death be an end to her torments. A set of stairs that should have taken me back down to the first floor led me to the third. Hallways twisted like non-Euclidean knots. In every mirror, I saw the face of an angry dead man.*

*Discretion being the better part of valor, I jumped out of the first window I saw. On a twisted ankle, I limped away from that hungry house.*

*Maxwell, please. Set my friend free. I'm a reporter, not Houdini.*



## Canada

In the turmoil following the Great War, the Dominion of Canada chose to pull away from the dynamically changing international scene, limiting the power of its federal government in favor of the provinces. The nation turned inward, struggling with public anger over wartime conscription policies and widespread fears about economic and social stability in the face of communist agitation in Europe and elsewhere. The mandate from the people, particularly the rural farmers, is for a "New National Policy" geared toward social welfare and economic recovery in the wake of the depression of 1920.

The provinces have reclaimed most of the powers ceded to the federal government before and during the hostilities and are taking steps to improve their economies and push deeper into wilderness areas. Ever-improving aircraft allow explorers and prospectors to stage far-flung expeditions into the Northwest Territory in search of gold and other metals, while the federal government is buying up privately owned railroads as part of an overall plan to create a public system of transport that can stimulate expansion and trade. In addition, the opening of the Panama Canal has made Vancouver a major shipping port for international trade, providing the dominion with access to markets previously out of reach. In a few short years, Canada has transformed itself from a moribund subject of the British Empire into a bustling land of opportunity, luring adventurers and opportunists from the United States to seek their fortunes in the far north.

With prohibition in full swing in the States, there is also a brisk business smuggling liquor across the border, and border towns are the scenes of raucous parties hosted by gangsters on the lam. Canada's famed Mounted Police are thinly spread over a vast territory, and their professional pride forbids them from turning to the American authorities for assistance. There have been recent calls for upstanding citizens to lend a hand in apprehending these lawless individuals, and like the vigilante bands that have recently taken to the streets of Chicago, some rough-and-ready Canucks will rise to the challenge of bringing these crooks to justice.

## Mexico

Spain's War of Independence in the early 1800's earned Mexico its freedom from Spanish rule but left the country's economy in shambles and its population decimated. The country still contained a powerful and wealthy Hispanic elite, who owned most of the country's arable land and controlled access to Mexico's vast mineral wealth. Liberal reformers struggled to redistribute the country's wealth so as to benefit the entire population. The bitter feud culminated in a 20-year civil war when the aristocrats tried to establish an outright monarchy. The idea of a Hispanic empire galvanized nationalist sentiment and gave the liberals the support needed to defeat the conservatives, but their victory was a hollow one. When liberal president Benito Juarez died in 1872, the government fell into chaos. The instability created a vacuum that an ambitious man could exploit, and in 1876, a military man named Porfirio Diaz seized control of the government, becoming a dictator in everything but name.

Diaz ruled the country for 35 years, continually amending the country's constitution to allow him to remain in power as President. He maintained control through his army and the feared



guardias rurales, or rural police forces, and dictated the ownership of property to individuals and corporations alike. Foreign investment was secured by granting vast gifts of land and other concessions to other countries, specifically the United States, England and France, and Diaz turned a blind eye to the ruthless exploitation of local peasants by the invited outsiders. The abuses continued until 1911, when a popular uprising led by Francisco Madero drove Diaz from power. But what should have been a triumph for the poor and the destitute citizens of Mexico turned into a bitter cycle of uprisings and bloodshed as a series of rebel factions vied for control of the country, all claiming to have the best interests of the Mexican peasant at heart.

Now, almost 15 years later, former general Alvaro Obregon has brought a degree of stability in the war-torn country and is reaching out to foreign investors to bring much-needed currency into the country. Unlike his predecessors, however, Obregon is also progressive with respect to social reform and ownership of property for the working class. He is appealing to noted men and women around the world to help in his efforts to rebuild his country, while keeping other would-be revolutionaries at bay. If history is any indicator, President Obregon needs all the help he can get.

## Central America

The small, agrarian countries of Central America -- Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica -- found themselves in circumstances similar to Mexico after the War of Independence, their ruling classes split between conservative aristocrats and liberal progressives. But unlike their northern neighbor, the Central American "banana republics" managed to peacefully separate themselves from Spain in 1821. Liberal dictators consolidated their power by courting foreign investment and using the profits to shore up their militaries. American corporations, who by 1920 purchased more than 90 percent of the region's exports, found their prosperity increasingly dependent on the continued stability of these regimes. Politics and business are now inextricably intertwined, and political influence in the United States has forced the Marines to intervene on several occasions to prop up shaky dictatorships, most recently in Nicaragua. American businessmen rig elections, bribe local officials and reportedly arrange the assassinations of popular dissidents who protest against the dictators. Corporations such as the United Fruit Company literally have the power of life and death over local banana farmers, controlling access to the markets that support the peasants' way of life.

Panama is another shameful example of the United States' opportunism in Central America. A province of Colombia in the 1800s, Panama was ideal for a strategic canal offering faster passage between the Pacific and the Atlantic. When Colombia suffered its own internal struggles during the War of a Thousand Days, the United States sent troops into Panama to "restore order" and would not relinquish control of the region until a treaty was signed that allowed the US to build a canal through the country. The 1903 treaty allowed for the creation of a Canal Zone running through the region that was essentially the sovereign territory of the United States. Today, the Panamanian government is supported by revenues obtained by ships passing



through the canal, and the Zone is a region of legal privilege and country-club prosperity, guarded by well-armed US Marines.

## South America

The countries of South America fared better than Mexico and the banana republics for the simple reason that they were considered backwaters of the Spanish Empire and left to go their own way with little fanfare during the War of Independence. The latter half of the 19th century was a time of growth and great prosperity for Argentina, Chile and the former Portuguese colony of Brazil, where waves of immigration from Europe stimulated economic growth and expansion into the vast countryside. Unlike their northern neighbors, whose militaries became an instrument of oppression for the disadvantaged, the countries of South America were spared the potential of violent overthrow and created stable, largely liberal governments. This is not to say that South America is free of problems. The burgeoning growth experienced in the years prior to the Great War created a stark disparity of wealth between the city-bred upper class and the rural lower class. Recently, attempts to organize labor unions in Argentina and Brazil have run afoul of harsh government crackdowns and rioting. Banditry is common in the hinterlands, and travelers are warned not to enter rural areas without a knowledgeable guide.

Nearly all of the continent's heartland is still unexplored. Every day, new rumors filter from the wilderness, of lost tribes, ancient cities and fabulous riches hidden in the Amazon. European-influenced universities in Brazil and Argentina continuously finance expeditions to push deeper into the wilderness, while companies from the United States send intrepid teams in search of mineral wealth such as gold and diamonds. Nearly every foray brings Westerners into contact with native tribes who look on the pale explorers as gods -- or monsters. There are many ancient sites in the rainforest that the tribes regard as sacred, some so old that the natives no longer even know for sure who built them and why, and they defend such places tooth and nail. In addition, natural hazards such as poisonous snakes, jaguars and the infamous river piranha promise a grisly end for those who fail to respect the rainforest's untamed natural order. Certain wild tales even speak of terrible, perhaps prehistoric creatures that still linger in the deepest, least accessible parts of the continent.

While some Westerners believe that there are things in the Amazon best left undisturbed, the potential for new medicines, new resources and new knowledge remains a lure that no intrepid soul can easily resist. As famed explorer Henry Jones, Jr. asserts, "The Amazon and its archaeological treasures presents Western civilization with a historical record that not only shows us who we are as a society, but what we might one day become. There is a complete cycle of human history there, overgrown and untapped, waiting to be brought to light."



# Africa and the Middle East

—dispatch by Sarah Gettel

"*Mokolé-Mémbe*," Kusavu whispered, his eyes wide with terror. We stared at one another in the confines of the tent, scarcely able to breathe. There was a splintering crash out in the darkness, deafening in the preternatural silence. Something heavy was moving through the jungle. Something huge. And it was coming closer.

It was close to midnight. The campfire had gone cold an hour ago. No one was willing to go out beyond the firelight to look for more wood, not after what had happened to Tshombe. I sat in a camp chair with a lantern at my feet, my journal propped in my lap. I looked down at the words and tried to focus my thoughts, but nothing would come. *A dinosaur. It's got to be a dinosaur.* Nothing else could be so big.

Suddenly, the tent flap jerked open, and Kusavu let out a strangled cry. Van Gelder darted into the tent, silent as a leopard. He pointed at the lantern. "Put that out *quick*, Missy," the white hunter hissed. His square jaw was set, his gaze as steely as ever, but there was an undercurrent of tension running through him that I hadn't seen before, even when the hippo tried to sink our boat out on the river.

My eyes were drawn to the double-barreled elephant gun in the hunter's hands. "What do you plan on doing with that?" I said, trying to sound forbidding. "We had an agreement Van Gelder. The beast isn't going to be harmed. This is a scientific expedition—"

"That was before Tshombe died," Van Gelder snarled. He and the Congolese river guide had been friends for a long time.

"Professor Dalton said he'd been killed by a rhino," I replied.

"There aren't any rhinos in the Congo, Missy," Van Gelder growled. "Dalton is a fool, and I'm a fool for letting the two of you talk me into this. No one's ever seen this beast and lived to tell the tale. *No one.*"

I wanted to tell him he was being foolish. Then I heard the scream, echoing through the darkness. A liquid shriek of inhuman terror.

"Professor Dalton!" Kusavu said in horror. Then, the air shook with a bone-chilling roar.



## North Africa

The rugged land and trackless deserts of Morocco and Algeria offer little to the world's empires, but their coastal ports are invaluable gateways to the Mediterranean and beyond. France and Spain took the region from the Ottoman Empire in the early 1900s and partitioned it as a joint possession. Unfortunately, neither government reckoned on the fiercely independent spirit of the Berber people. Only moderately passive under Ottoman rule, the Berbers vehemently refused to accept the European infidels and rose up in revolt. The tribes of the Rif, led by the charismatic and ruthless Sheik Abd al-Karim, embarked on a guerilla war for independence that continues today. Spain and France responded with brutal reprisals. Spain, in particular, was especially cruel, earning international disdain for its treatment of the Moroccan natives. But the Rif rebellion continues, and losses among the Spanish Foreign Legion commanded by Francisco Franco continue to mount.

Abd el-Karim and his guerillas struggle amid the unforgiving sands against the hard-bitten souls of the Legion Etrangere, the famous French Foreign Legion. Despite its hardships, the Legion is popular both with Frenchmen and adventurous souls worldwide, for it will accept recruits no matter their nationality or previous record. The tradition in the Legion is that every recruit begins a new life in the ranks, all past sins forgotten. In return, the Legionnaires man lonely forts isolated by unforgiving sands and march countless patrols through enemy-infested territory, and the Berbers have no pretensions about fighting a "civilized" war. No quarter is asked, and none is given. Many are the tales of lonely Legionnaire outposts surrounded and overwhelmed by the enemy, their defenders slain to the last man. Yet, the Legion never lacks recruits, and its motley collection of criminals, idealists and would-be heroes keep the roads open and the frontier forts manned against the best that al-Karim can muster. At this stage, the struggle seems at a stalemate, but a bold stroke from either side, such as an all-out attack on the capital of Fez or the severing of one of the strategic trade roads could change the situation overnight.

## South Africa

Britain's interests in the region began commercially, with mining of the region's vast mineral deposits. This action brought the British into conflict with the Dutch and German Afrikaners, and that brought British troops into the region to secure imperial interests. Since then, the administration of South Africa has placed an increasing burden on British resources, as the expense of controlling such vast territory currently exceeds the amount of profit to be had from its exploitation. The League of Nations gave German South West Africa to Britain as a League mandate, straining taxed resources still further.

In addition, a recent uprising by the Ashanti underscored the need for a transition to local government and some form of autonomy for native Africans. But many regions contain sizeable numbers of white settlers who have no intention of turning over their authority to the majority Africans, not to mention the areas owned by mining corporations whose activities would suffer from a change in the current government. The British and their agents face a daunting challenge of diplomacy and statesmanship



amid a sea of conflicting agendas, and there is no supportable resolution in sight.

## Towns, Farms, and Outposts

European, Indian and Middle Eastern immigrants live in significant numbers in eastern and southern Africa. While the natives continue to vastly outnumber the settlers, there are whole towns and surrounding rural districts that look very much like their counterparts "back home," whether that's central England or the shores of the Indian Ocean. At least, many settlers think of them as just like home, choosing to ignore the native servants and wildlife as unimportant to the overall effect.

It's very different in western Africa. The dense jungle resists almost all efforts at clearing or cultivation. Exotic diseases flourish. The area's tribes fight back against would-be conquerors more effectively. The European presence consists almost entirely of small forts and outposts, widely scattered and depending on river routes to keep in touch. Nothing in the Congo compares to the great estates of Kenya or South Africa. They have their "untamed" lands--many of which are perfectly civilized in their own way, whether or not the imperial powers acknowledge it -- but they continue to make much better targets for empire builders.

The Darkest Africa of popular story exists mostly in the jungles of West Africa.

## West Africa

The Belgian government has no interest whatsoever in relinquishing its sole overseas colony. The Congo River Valley is enormously profitable, and the local administrators brutally exploit the native population in the quest for more. Belgian corporations practice outright slavery: They purchase fit young men from tribal chiefs under the guise of "taxes," then work them to death in the mines or in the fields of the rubber plantations. There are reports that no less than 20,000 laborers died during repair work on the Leopoldville railroad alone. If the laborers attempt to desert in large numbers, the Belgians take their wives and children hostage. Paramilitary gangs hired by the corporations hunt the laborers who do escape; the corporations pay the hunters with money or liquor in exchange for the severed hand of every deserter they kill. Sometimes, if the deserter eludes the gangs, hunters go into a village and take the hand of the first person they see, so they can still claim their reward.

Corruption and petty tyranny are the order of the day at the trading outposts along the great river, and woe unto the traveler who fails to pay the necessary bribes to the chain of administrators one encounters along the way. Unfortunately, bribery is a loathsome, but necessary, evil for those intrepid spirits who seek the great Congolese jungle, considered by many to be the true heart of Africa.

Rumors abound of the treasures and mysteries that wait in the jungle's nighted depths. The trackless expanse is said to contain everything from King Solomon's Mines and the lost tribes of Israel to an ancient, advanced civilization said to have existed at the same time as fabled Atlantis. Even if these wild legends are false, there is no doubt that the region contains many rare and unique species of flora and fauna, enough to occupy a legion of researchers for many years. The jungle is also home to tribes of savages



who have never acknowledged the march of civilization and regard even their fellow Africans with murderous ire. Additionally, the jungle itself is dense and haunted with every manner of predator to be found on the continent, none of them holding any fear of man. No less than six European expeditions -- and two rescue parties -- have vanished into the jungle without a trace in the last year alone. Whatever secrets the vast wilderness hides, it keeps them still, despite humanity's best efforts to unravel them.

Wealthy philanthropists and idealistic politicians in Europe and America are keen to see Belgium relinquish its hold on the Congolese people or, at the very least, loosen its iron grip enough to allow them some amount of self-rule. Mostly, the initiatives involve diplomatic inquiries made to the League of Nations, but some prefer more direct means, such as fomenting a general revolt against the Belgians in the Congo. This action would all but force League intervention and require some form of mediation that would no doubt have advantageous results for the Congolese. There are rumors of men making discreet offers to experienced mercenaries in Paris, Casablanca and Tangiers. If so, then armed conflict cannot be far behind, and it remains to be seen what sort of response the Belgian government is likely to make regarding its one overseas prize.

## The Middle East

At the turn of the century, the Egyptian economy had effectively collapsed due to mismanagement by its Ottoman potentate. Seizing the initiative, Britain stepped in and took control of the country's financial sector, ostensibly to protect British trade interests, and moved troops into the country from the Suez Canal Zone to maintain order. Since then, Egypt has formed its own nationalist party and elected a native king, but in every significant way, the country remains under British control.

This situation allows European archaeologists and scholars broad access to ancient Egyptian sites, such as the Valley of the Kings, where Carter and Carnarvon discovered Tut-ankh-amen. However, many Egyptians fail to appreciate the scientific and cultural scholarship these efforts represent, seeing them as nothing more than European grave-robbing expeditions. There is growing dissent among the poor and the working class, and there are stories of cults in Cairo and Alexandria devoted to driving out foreign interlopers by any means necessary.

Since the end of the Great War Britain has lobbied the League quite forcefully for the authority to manage the regions of Palestine Transjordan and Iraq, all formerly Ottoman possessions. By establishing governments friendly to Britain, the empire could count on an undisturbed flow of fuel. The League accepted Britain's overtures, on the condition that the empire must also address the issue of creating an independent state for the Jews in Palestine, an issue of considerable concern to the governments of Europe. The British agreed, not realizing the magnitude of the task.

The British government did not count on a surge of Arab nationalism after the Ottoman Empire's collapse. This is ironic because the British helped to start it in the first place. During the Great War, the British Foreign Office hit upon a strategy of harassing the Ottomans by creating Arab uprisings in the Middle East. The legendary T. E. Lawrence, otherwise known today as



"Lawrence of Arabia," stirred the Arabs to action with the promise of Arab self-rule at the end of the war, and the sheiks held him to his promise. One sheik in particular, Ibn Saud, has taken it upon himself to reunite the land his ancestors once ruled and has, thus far, enjoyed remarkable success, conquering much of the Arabian Peninsula.

The British have created monarchies in Transjordan and Iraq, but Palestine remains a thorn in the imperial lion's paw. The Arabs there have nationalistic aims of their own and bitterly resent the steady flow of Jewish refugees onto their ancestral land. Already, there have been riots in Lebanon, and the British are at their wits' end trying to find a diplomatic solution to the dilemma. They cannot go back on their promises to the Jews and to the League, and yet, they cannot expect anything other than violent resistance from the Palestinians, who only see their land being stolen from them and given to someone else. Both sides of the conflict have garnered sympathetic attention from humanitarian groups in Europe and the United States, but it remains to be seen how the matter may be resolved.

*-from the correspondence of the AEon Society for Gentlemen*

Greetings Maxwell Anderson Mercer,

I am Enkidu. I have heard of your search for the strange and unusual. I wish to join your Society. I believe my insights and scientific knowledge (specifically in regards to botany) would be invaluable to your organization.

Before making arrangements, I should tell you this. I will need certain visas and documents to safely make the trip. I am a gorilla.

-Enkidu

PS: Do NOT send Safari Jack Tallon. We have a history. Do not let his prejudices cloud your judgment, nor listen to his fear that we are just like the evil tribe of our kind he fought in Africa. We are the descendants of exiles from that realm and wish the world well.



# Asia and the Pacific Rim

—dispatch by Sarah Gettel

The two men carried me easily between them, dragging me across the moonlit courtyard. They wore the traditional attire of samurai, complete with long, curved swords thrust through their belts. Their grip was like iron. Even without the aftereffects of the ether and the ropes that bound me hand and foot, I knew that there wasn't much point in resisting.

A man waited for us in the center of the courtyard, beside a large copper cauldron. Unlike his men, Sakamura wore an impeccably tailored European suit and held a Dunhill between his humorless lips. The samurai stopped before him and forced me to my knees. I fought to clear my head. "You've got a hell of a way with the ladies, Ito," I said. "If you'd wanted to show me your estate, all you had to do was ask."

Sakamura's smile didn't quite reach his eyes. "Charming as ever, Miss Gettel," he replied, his unaccented English betraying his Ivy League education. "I wish that this was a social matter. Truly I do. But you and I both know otherwise. And I haven't much time for pleasantries." He gestured with a sharp nod, and the samurai picked me up like a rag doll, carrying me to the cauldron.

"For what it's worth, I congratulate you on your persistence," Sakamura said, following in our wake. "Your deductions in Kyoto were impressive. I didn't think my associates left any clues behind."

"Your associates? You mean the Black Dragons," I said. The samurai swung my legs over the lip of the cauldron. It was full of a thick fluid that quickly soaked through my clothes. I fought the urge to gasp.

"I'm afraid that name is unfamiliar to me," he replied smoothly.

"Malarkey," I snapped. "Spare me the song-and-dance, Sakamura. My friends—"

"Are dead, Miss Gettel." Sakamura stepped closer. "They may have destroyed our earthquake projector, but the lab was completely incinerated. No one could have survived that explosion." He took a long drag from his cigarette. "All is not lost, however. I know that you were able to rescue Doctor Akagi. Tell me where he is, and I might be able to forgive your crimes against my people."

It felt good to be able to laugh in the man's face. "You're going to have to do better than that, Sakamura."

He nodded slowly. "I thought I might." With a flick of his wrist he let the cigarette fall onto the wood piled beneath the cauldron. The oil-soaked kindling caught at once. "It's not a pleasant thing to be boiled alive, Miss Gettel. My honorable ancestors reserved such punishment for traitors and spies. You die by inches as the heat sinks down to your bones." Firelight gleamed along the harsh outline of Sakamura's face. "You could last for days, Miss Gettel — but I don't think it will take that long. Do you?"





## China

The relationship between China and the West is a long, sordid tale of greed and reckless self-interest going back as far as the 16th century. England, France, Portugal and Spain were the first European nations to seek trade with the vast Chinese Empire, and at first, the Manchu emperors could dictate severe restrictions on where and what could be traded to the foreigners. China exported large amounts of silk, porcelain and spices but imported nothing; items were purchased with silver alone, and Western merchants were often at the mercy of authoritarian Chinese officials.

The balance of power shifted last century when the British and Americans discovered an item for trade that the Chinese couldn't resist: opium. In 1839, the Chinese moved to restrict the opium trade, and the emboldened British declared war. The war ended with the Treaty of Nanking, which allowed the British free access to five Chinese ports and gained them the island of Hong Kong. The opium trade continued, and in 1844, France and the United States secured similar treaties, opening up Chinese ports to unrestricted trade. It was an enormous loss of face for the Chinese emperor, and as the emperor's authority waned, more and more countries moved in to secure their own territorial concessions. At the same time, regional governors saw a chance to take advantage of the current decline, and the countryside fell prey to ambitious warlords who cruelly mistreated their subjects. Britain and the United States tried to prop up the Manchus but, at the same time, moved to protect their own lucrative trading rights. The entire country was opened up to foreign merchants, who were no longer subject to Chinese law and could go and do whatever they pleased. In the late 1800s, Britain took control of Burma, while France took Tongking and Japan conquered Korea in a lightning military campaign. Even Russia entered the fray, casting hungry eyes toward Manchuria and Port Arthur.

Chinese resentment reached the boiling point in 1899, culminating in the brief but savage Boxer Rebellion. Secret societies of Chinese nationalists demanded the removal of all foreign influence from their sacred land. Foreign missions were burned, and rioting claimed the lives of European men, women and children. Troops from the Western powers arrived to restore order in 1900, and the rebellion was crushed, but the proverbial genie had been let out of the bottle. From that point onward, the spirit of revolution was loose among the Chinese people.

The last imperial dynasty didn't fall all at once. General Yuan Shih-Kai, strongest of the imperial commanders, spent years negotiating deals with allies and enemies, only to then rush to break them before he could be betrayed in turn. The Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, claims to lead a Chinese republic with Yuan as president, but depending on his mood, Yuan is just as likely to call himself supreme warlord or even emperor. Democratic and socialist groups fight for attention at court and in the provinces with Soviet advisors, stalwarts hoping to return a Qing emperor to the throne, idealists and opportunists of all flavors. The Nationalist Party is too weak and torn by internal dispute to offer unified leadership. Anarchy and lawlessness remain the norm outside Peking and the coastal cities. Matters got particularly bad during the Great War, when European troops were busy elsewhere, but didn't improve much once peace returned to Europe.



Nationalist leaders accept Bolshevik support out of the desperate sense that they must have someone's aid, and the Western powers don't respond to pleas for help.

At present, China is still in chaos, imperiled from within by savage rural warlords and from without by ambitious foreign powers, especially Japan. The Kuomintang is restructuring itself along the model of the Bolsheviks, giving the party much-needed organization, but there are already signs of dissatisfaction between the new Communists, led by Sun Yat-Sen, and the more traditional Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-Shek. The foreign legations, especially Britain and the United States, are increasingly embroiled in the intrigues at Peking, seeking to hedge Bolshevik influence and create a bastion against the threat of Japanese imperialism.

*—from the journals of Sarah Gettel*

*While traveling through China to the Temple of the Hungry Ghosts, I met an old acquaintance of mine, "Wild" Bill Codero. He was a soldier of fortune, selling his gun to the highest bidder following the Great War. When last I saw him, it was Borneo, and his eyes spoke of cordite and bloodshed. What I saw now was a different man wearing Bill's face. The pain, the anger, the fear — they were gone.*

*Codero politely greeted me, something completely out of character for the man. He was courteous and respectful, not just to me, but to the Chinese around him. With a little conversation, I discovered he had recently returned from Tibet.*

*"You must go, Miss Gettel. You must go to see them! They changed my life. I am at peace now."*

*"Who?" I asked.*

*"The Yeti," he said. He proceeded to tell me of a hidden city, high in the mountains of Tibet. There, hairy, blue-faced ape-men teach enlightenment. They believe that all mankind (and I presume Yeti-kind) will contribute their souls to an enlightened group mind, which will use its mental power to travel to the stars and beyond time itself.*

*"You do not believe me," he said at the end of his story. "You feel I am playing an elaborate joke on you. You are thinking this is not even worth a note to the Aeon Society." I looked at him in shock. No one, not even my closest comrades, knew I was taking my walkabout for the Society. My mind raced. Codero continued, "I see them in your mind, Sarah. I see them as easily as you see me before you." He stood up. "You should see the Yeti, Sarah. They will teach you peace." At that, he got up and left.*

*I was half-determined to follow him and half-determined to abandon my plans and head straight for Tibet. But I was carrying the Chan Document and couldn't spare a day.*



## Massacre Survivor Urges Commissioner to Resign

—exclusive interview by Sarah Gettel

The streets of Wanchai in Hong Kong ran with blood following a savage street battle between police, gangsters known as the "Dragon's Coil" and a group of violent insurgents called the "Black Mandarin Tong." It is not a situation where you'd expect to find a nun, but luckily, there was one on hand. Sister Chloe Markham, an American attached to the Jesuit mission in Hong Kong, is credited with saving the lives of her fellow missionaries by negotiating their release from the Black Mandarin himself, a mysterious figure who seized their church as a stronghold during the riot.

Surprisingly, she has as many bitter words for Police Commissioner Dudley Maddington as for her captor. Maddington, a retired commodore of the Royal Navy, has only been in Hong Kong for five months, but already, Sister Markham is urging him to retire. I caught up with her while she was recovering in the Sacred Heart Clinic.

**Sarah Gettel:** Can you tell me what happened when the tong seized the church?

**Chloe Markham:** We were in the middle of Mass when we heard the disturbance outside. Father Greenfield briefly halted the ceremony to see what was happening. The next thing we knew, members of the Black Mandarin Tong were surging through the front and side doors. They seized me, the priests and the other nuns and began barricading themselves inside. We could hear gunshots outside as the police fought with the Dragon's Coil. Father Murdoch was incensed, demanding that the tong leave at once. The Black Mandarin killed him with a single blow.

**SG:** Then what happened?

**CM:** The police began shouting for the Black Mandarin to surrender. He told them he'd kill us all if they didn't back off and let his men escape. He carried Father Murdoch's body to the bell tower and flung it at them.

**SG:** How did you ever persuade him to let you go?

**CM:** It wasn't me. Not entirely, anyhow. This was not my first... encounter with the Black Mandarin. I know how he thinks, and I knew he would never listen to us. But the congregation — the Chinese poor we were helping — they could convince him. The Jesuits say I saved them, but those peasants were the ones who saved us all.

**SG:** Again, I have to ask... how? I mean, isn't the Black Mandarin the man who said "Christianity is opium for the soul?"

**CM:** Yes, he said that. But when they told him about the clinic, about the medicine and the food, he released me as a favor to them. Then, I convinced the police that he could be trusted to let the other clergy go if they retreated and let him escape.

**SG:** How did you know he wouldn't simply slaughter them?

**CM:** He is a cruel man, and utterly merciless, but he prides himself on being just. He would never dishonor a vow.

**SG:** Would you say the same about the leader of the Dragon's Coil?

**CM:** I have never met the Ubiquitous Dragon, and I hope I never will. Every word I hear told of him adds to a litany of infamy, greed and self-interest. Both he and the Black Mandarin are criminals, but they are as different as night and day. Commissioner Maddington was a fool to treat them as if they were the same.

**SG:** What do you mean?

**CM:** Maddington thought the Black Mandarin Tong was fighting the Dragon's Coil over who would control the illegal opium trade to the United States. Nothing could be farther from the truth, and if the British had been smart enough to send a policeman who spoke Chinese, they'd know that. The tong wants to eradicate the opium trade in Hong Kong, as a prelude to running the British out. The Black Mandarin has more in common with Paul Revere than Al Capone.

**SG:** It almost sounds like you admire him.

**CM:** Admire? Never. But I respect him. He would never have endangered hundreds of innocents, the way Maddington's rash "police action" did. The Ubiquitous Dragon is a cynic and an opportunist. He simply wants free rein to traffic in vice. The Black Mandarin is an idealist and a fanatic, and he will not rest until every Westerner is gone from China.

It is folly to underestimate this man. He knows us far better than we know him. In fact, the last thing he said to me was from the Bible. "If you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind."



## French Indochina

While Britain and the United States remain focused on China proper, the French devote considerable energy to exploiting the southeastern portion of the Asian peninsula, the region now referred to as French Indochina. The countries in this region -- Laos, Cambodia, Annam, Tonkin and Cochin China -- are organized into an administrative zone called the Union Indochinoise, an arrangement that cares far more for harvests of rubber and manganese than the welfare of the native peoples. French rule in Indochina closely resembles the current Belgian administration in the Congo, providing security for French corporations and plantation owners who keep their workers in conditions akin to outright slavery. There is no justice for the peoples of Indochina, and unrest is brutally repressed. Unlike the Congo, where the excesses of the Belgians attracted international scrutiny, Indochina is an obscure backwater where the French can continue their colonial practices largely unobserved. French colonial administrators are notoriously corrupt, and many rule over their regions like petty emperors.

Nevertheless, the ancient ruins of Cambodia hold an uncounted hoard of knowledge waiting to be tapped, not to mention the promise of mineral and botanical riches hidden deep in Indochina's jungles. Currently, however, there is a serious problem with piracy in the South China Sea, likely abetted through bribes to French officials, a situation that cries out for stalwart souls to see justice done.

## Japan

When Commodore Perry and his fleet arrived in Japan in 1853 and ended almost two centuries of government-enforced isolation, the American initiative discovered a country tired of the repressive hand of the military-ruled shogunate and eager for reform. Unlike the Chinese, who fought Western ideas tooth and nail, the Japanese took a more pragmatic view, realizing that unless they instituted immediate changes to their industry and society they would be no match for the more modern European powers. In less than 50 years, they did just that, transforming their essentially feudal system of government into a parliamentary system and deposing the shogun in favor of a restored imperial family. The Meiji emperor is a figurehead of sorts, similar to the Western monarchies, but his position still holds enormous influence with the Japanese people. Real governmental power lies in a small oligarchy of ancient families who were the driving force behind modernization, supported by the powerful Mitsubishi, Mitsui and Sumitomo families, who together controlled much of the country's industry and finances. By 1900, Japan introduced a convertible currency and compulsory education and instituted a practice of sending its brightest students overseas to study Western industrial techniques.

Not everyone supported the idea of a Westernized Japan. The country's warrior class, which had dominated the country for the 200 years prior to the Meiji restoration, was resentful at the erosion of its power base and the threats to Japan's cultural identity. Consequently, it pressed relentlessly for Japan to adopt an aggressive foreign policy that would make the country equivalent to the great powers of Europe and broaden Japan's control over the Pacific Rim. Their efforts led to conflict with Russia over the



Chinese province of Manchuria, and the successful conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 rewarded the militants with a wave of popular support. This led to the conquest of Korea in 1910, turning that country into a Japanese colony and a source of cheap labor to support the growing Japanese industrial base.

Since the reforms of the last century, Japan has become a victim of its own success. Increased prosperity led to a much larger population, which, in turn, makes increasing demands on Japanese industry. Japan has the manpower and skill to become a powerful force in the Pacific but lacks many of the natural resources to make that dream a reality. Such resources can be found in abundance in China and the islands of the Pacific, and there is mounting pressure from the military to take advantage of the current instability in Asia. Extreme nationalist organizations such as the secretive Black Dragon Society actively recruit members of the military and parliament to subvert the authority of the embattled liberal government, and already, one prime minister who opposed the nationalists has been assassinated. The United States has recently expressed concern over the growing threat Japan poses to the Pacific, but with the unrest in China occupying much of America and Europe's attention, it is unclear who will rise to the challenge of saving Japan from a descent into imperialism.

## India

For many decades, India has been the jewel in the British Empire's colonial crown, a distant, exotic land crying out for justice, equality and civilization. Since gaining control of the country in the 1850s, the British colonial government has labored hard to bring India into the modern age, instituting legal, social and educational reforms amid a tangled maze of conflicting religious laws and ancient customs. In the process, the British have ridden roughshod over a society that has existed for thousands of years, redefining political borders and social roles with righteous self-confidence and brutally suppressing any attempts at protest. Nowhere else in the Empire has the "white man's burden" been so dutifully addressed, and nowhere else are its fallacies so painfully clear.

Though the British have made significant progress in certain areas, particularly the expansion of railroads and the construction of hospitals, schools and other public works, Indian society, in general, remains largely unchanged. The rigid Hindu caste system remains in place, relegating the majority of the population to abject poverty and deplorable living conditions, and despite numerous attempts, there has still been no success in establishing a unified legal system to protect everyone, regardless of caste, religion or race. Tensions between Christians, Hindus and Muslims remain high, and after several bloody uprisings, the British now respond to large-scale protest with merciless force. This only adds fuel to the growing Indian nationalist movement led by the Indian National Congress. The Congress' leader, Mohandas K. Gandhi, was surprisingly successful at winning concessions from the colonial government by a method of peaceful protest he terms satyagraha, or "devotion to truth." He hoped to show Great Britain that its violent methods of maintaining order were inherently flawed, and by extension, its position in India was untenable. Tragically, Gandhi's movement was



severely undermined in 1922 when extremist members of the Indian National Congress instigated armed attacks on British citizens. Since being released from prison in February of this year, Gandhi has declared his crusade of satyagraha to be a failure and has withdrawn from political life despite countless entreaties to take up the cause once more.

Despite widespread political and social woes and the increasing threat of violence from terrorist groups and Indian secret societies, idealists of all stripes are still drawn to the country, bringing great dreams of discovery, enlightenment and progress. Scientists and scholars study the jungle-shrouded ruins of the ancient Mogul Empire, while explorers and engineers push back the wilderness with roads, dams and railways. Only time will tell if the British and Indians can face the daunting challenges of self-rule and social reform that the country desperately needs, but as Gandhi has shown, one person with a vision can make all the difference.

## Australia

Since its emergence as a unified commonwealth in 1901, Australia has struggled to reshape itself from a collection of dependent colonies to a self-sufficient, prosperous member of the British Empire. The Great War was a grim coming of age for the Commonwealth, which provided a quarter of a million men to the Allied cause and suffered terrible losses on the fields of Europe and the Middle East. The long years of bloodshed severely tested Australian loyalty to Great Britain and sparked an ardent nationalist movement dedicated to increasing the Commonwealth's autonomy and broadening its power base in the Pacific Rim. Politicians and visionaries have turned their eyes to the nation's vast and empty interior, where they believe that, with guts, determination and a steady influx of capital, the outback can be tamed into productive farmland and sites for heavy industry.

"Men, money and markets" are the watchwords of Australia's Nationalist government, devoting considerable funds to lure settlers to the Commonwealth and drive deeper into the frontier. A million people inhabit Sydney, with immigrants arriving from all over the Empire and other parts of Europe. Raw exports to Great Britain and elsewhere in the form of wool, wheat and other natural resources provide the cash to pay for settlement and growth. The government goes to great lengths to entice foreign investment and promote trade.

Not everyone in the Commonwealth is happy with the arrival of so many state-supported settlers. Rural farmers and landholders resent having their spreads appropriated by the state and handed out to foreigners, not to mention the increased competition for their goods. Racial tensions are on the rise as well. From the earliest days of Australia's settlement, the struggle to claim the land from the aborigines was characterized as asserting the superiority of white civilization, and the ideal of building a "white Australia" is still strong. Non-white immigrants face open hostility, even violence, and what remains of the land's native peoples are relegated to isolated reservations.



The League of Nations reapportioned Germany's Pacific colonies, giving New Guinea to Australia and awarding the Marshall and Caroline Islands to Japan. Though Japan is currently one of Australia's biggest customers, both countries see one another as competitors in the bid for the resources of the Pacific Rim. At this point, the two nations seem evenly matched, racing neck-and-neck to see who will build enough industrial might to assure dominance in the region.

## Lost Worlds and Hidden Realms

--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

My dearest colleagues, while I have written about many of the amazing things this world has to offer, I have saved the best for last. For now I must speak of the realms not of this Earth. In my travels around this great planet, I have seen sights that make my dear flying man seem normal by comparison.

Though I lack hard evidence, I must assure you of this: Dinosaurs walk the Earth. There are strange worlds out there, alien to our experience, that touch our own. I have parachuted into the Sky Citadel of Doctor Zorbo and narrowly escaped being sacrificed to no less than seven cults of dark gods that walked the Earth before mankind's reign. The clamorous night music of the Carpathian mountains and the screams emanating from the Forgotten Temple of the Hungry Ghosts haunt my nightmares. During my travels, I have interviewed many of the world's greatest minds, I have asked them all what they think of these lost worlds. What are they? Where did they come from? And why have they been found now, when they must have been hidden for centuries?

No one has given me the same answer. A mystic in Greenwich Village believes that Hammersmith's experiment opened a doorway from a realm of magic to our world. The otherworldly inhabitants of these obscure realms are merely travelers, lost between worlds. Professor Dixon tells me that there is no magic, only science we have not yet quantified. He claims there is a rational, scientific explanation for all that I have seen. (This answer depressed me for a good week. There should be magic.) An archeologist I shared a cigarette with in Cairo claims that it is simply a coincidence of fortune that these realms have been discovered in this time. He told me of mysteries beyond what I had seen, mysteries he encountered years ago, as a boy. We just happen to be on a "hot streak." Still another theory is that these realms are not from other dimensions, but other times. There is some merit to that theory, though the scientist who shared it with me was stymied by my follow-up question; if these places to another time, why are all of them rifts to the past? Shouldn't we see some glimpse of the future?

My dear friend, Maxwell, please have Dr. Primoris reply to my letters. I would like to learn his opinion on this. He does claim to be the smartest man in the world, after all. (Perhaps we should find the smartest woman.)



# Dinosaur Swamp

—dispatch by Sarah Gettel

"Madame Gettel," said Paul Robichaux. "We gots to go. You pay me to take you here. You didn't pay me enough to stay dis long."

"Fiddlesticks," I replied, snapping another picture with Professor Dixon's Handy-Camera. "All I have are pictures of odd ferns and a smashed crawfish trap. I need to see something a little more... convincing. We've seen no signs of your 'Mokolé-Mêmebe.'" I put the camera down on a tree limb and wiped my sweaty brow. I had not thought it possible, but it was even hotter here than back in Lafayette. I heard a pounding sound, as if a tree had fallen over. I whipped my head about to see what the source of the sound was. I froze, stunned at seeing a creature that should have died 65 million years ago.

When I was a little girl, my father would read to me of the dinosaurs, the terrible thunder lizards that once ruled this world. (No matter what unscientific twits like William Jennings Bryan may say.) I recognized the beast immediately. The wide skull. The armored back. The fierce club-like tail. An ankylosaurus! And *it was looking at me! Without taking my eyes off the dinosaur, I reached for my camera.* My shaking fingers knocked Professor Dixon's lightweight camera to the ground. I heard a yelp from back at the boat.

"Dat's not de one we saw, Madame Gettel. But it look 'ongry," he whispered.

In the depths of the Atchafalaya Basin between Baton Rouge and Lafayette, dinosaurs live again. The specific corner is one the Robichaux family fished for "mudbugs" for generations, going back to before the Civil War. In the spring of 1922, a storm prevented a pair of Robichaux fishermen from going on their normal excursion the weekend before Mardi Gras. For them, it was a time to smoke foul cigars, drink bootleg whiskey and, of course, fish. That weekend, they learned how bait must feel! In the pre-dawn light, they saw something. An enormous neck, 20 feet long, erupted out of the water. Sharp teeth filled the creature's mouth, and it roared at the rapidly departing fishermen. Uncle Jean Robichaux told his nephew Paul that the beast was Mokole-Membe, a great beast out of African mythology.

Armed with a new shotgun (and a hefty bribe), Paul and I returned to the scene of the crime. As we traveled deeper into the heart of the swamp, I recognized the changes in flora. There was no clear demarcation between the familiar sights of the swamp and the subtly different plant life farther in. But even my untrained naturalist's eye could see a difference. The trees themselves were the same, but the vegetation surrounding them



seemed different. As we progressed, Paul grew nervous. I promised we would not dally too long, and as soon as we got to their fishing spot, we could turn around. Naturally, I wished to stay as long as possible, in hopes of seeing this swamp-monster.

After assuring M'sieur Robichaux that the ankylosaurus we'd discovered ate plants, not fishermen, we heard the terrible bellow of a creature born millions of years ago. The ankylosaurus started at the noise and trampled off, down the edge of the island.

I must say, my reporter's instincts were quivering at the opportunity to see what startled the ankylosaurus, but the good sense of my father reminded me that when the herbivores flee, it's generally because of a predator. I had no desire to be an appetizer. I looked for the camera. It was sinking in the mud, over on the other side of a downed tree. I considered reaching for it, but I heard the creature roar again. Discretion being the better part of valor (and lacking a lightning pistol), I fled for the safety of the pirogue, and the two of us paddled away from that island in the swamps as fast as possible.

Towering over the dense cypress trees, I saw the source of the clamor. The king of the dinosaurs: tyrannosaurus rex. I thanked God that the creature could not swim and then hoped that the paleontologists were correct about that detail.

Our escape from the dinosaur swamp was blessedly uneventful. Under the pretext of a nature story, I spoke with a paleontologist at Tulane University. Based on my secondhand description, he identified the dinosaur seen by the Robichaux as an elasmosaurus. All three dinosaurs were native to the late Cretaceous period. And now, 1924.

## The Beast-Men of the Chiquibul Caves

—dispatch by Sarah Gettel

I awoke to the sounds of primitive chanting under red crystal skies. My captors had tied me to a post near the fire, as if I was a witch or something. "Not again," I grumbled under my breath. I stretched for my pocketknife but could not reach it. I was tied too tightly. I looked about. More cavemen surrounded me, looking at me curiously and gibbering in their primitive language. With the added light of the bonfire, I could see them more clearly. They were Neanderthals! As I looked about, I counted close to 20 savages. They had tools, mostly made of rock. I saw a female (I *think* it was a female) scraping the hide of some indeterminate beast with a sharpened rock. Others were using stone knives to sharpen sticks into spears. Then, all analytical thought fled from my head. Off to the other side, where the Neanderthals were chanting, I saw the focus of their rite. The hunters danced around a neatly stacked pile of human skulls. The leader raised a human skull into the air and shouted, "EEETAH!"

At that moment, the dancing warriors stopped and turned to me. I soon realized that I was not just a guest for dinner, but the main course!



Following the Adventure of the Smoking Mirror, my next assignment was to investigate stories of "ape men" from the jungles of Belize.

With a broken-down car that had seen better days, I drove into the Maya mountain range, stopping at small towns and trying, with my broken Spanish, to determine the veracity of the story.

After a few weeks, I was able to piece together enough information to narrow down the sightings to the area near the Chiquibul caves. They are one of the largest underground cave complexes known and the Mayans were rumored to have buried their dead there. I attempted to hire a local guide, but no one was willing to go with me there. "What is there that is so frightening?" I asked.

"Muerte," they said. "No one goes into the caves and returns."

Well, with a challenge like that, how could I refuse? The locals were more than willing to take my money in return for maps and directions. By now, I had learned the value of carrying sufficient firearms, and while I am far from Miss Newfield's level of expertise, I do tend to hit what I am aiming at.

The directions I had did not do justice to the enormity of the cave mouth. At the base of an enormous sinkhole, it stretched a good 100 feet tall. As yet, I had seen nothing out of the ordinary (for a tropical rain forest, that is -- deadly snakes and the like proved commonplace). Due to the lateness of the hour, I set up camp and decided to begin my explorations the next day.





After a somewhat restless sleep, I awoke and began my explorations. I had been spelunking before and thought I knew what I was doing. The enormity of the caverns overwhelmed me. I took numerous pictures, which I have included. Wondrous formations of rock and crystal stretched from floor to ceiling. In one place, stalactites taller than I but no thicker than a pencil draped down from the ceiling. It looked as if the ceiling had long, white hair.

In the deepest regions of the caves, I started to see signs that others had been here before me: a gnawed-on cave bat here, droppings of a large animal there. I thought I was alert and ready, but the beast-men took me unawares. When I awoke, I was in an entirely different part of the caves. To my amazement, red illumination spilled throughout the cavern. The distant ceiling glowed from an enormous ruby-red crystal formation. The light of the crystal sun provided as much light as a harvest moon. I was in the center of a large encampment of primitive men, resembling the Neanderthals I had read of in Father's books. They were large and brutal but starting to show signs that they had not been eating well recently. Looking about, I saw some dying shrubbery and the gnawed-on remains of small game. Whatever life eked out an existence down here was dying off. I presume the vegetation is dying from a lack of sunlight, and with nothing to eat, the game is dying as well. This, of course, begs the question: How did the cavemen, the plants and the animals get down there? Even more, what powers the ruby-red sun that gives light to this underground world?

Fortunately, a brave soul delivered me from becoming dinner. I had never seen such a man before. He was over seven feet tall and looked like he was carved from marble. He was pale as the moon itself. He wore a sliver of the crystal sky on a thong around his neck. Even more amazing was that, when he was angry, the crystal glowed with the red light of the setting sun. Though he was clearly not a weakling normally, under the crystal's light he fought with the power of a mountain gorilla, handily defeating the leader of the cavemen in single combat. With an enormous dire wolf at his side, he led me out of the cave, the remaining Neanderthals scattering into the shadows as we passed. My rescuer could speak, calling himself "Gar," though he knew no language I recognized. Gar led me out of the light of the crystal sun and into darkness. My torch was long gone, and neither he nor his wolf needed light to see. I only occasionally saw flashes of light coming from the crystal around Gar's neck when he exerted himself. At one point, he lifted me up over a fast-moving stream. It felt as if I were weightless. Led about like a blind woman for days, eventually we came to the cave entrance. He would not leave the cave, the light appeared to pain his eyes, and he retreated into the caves from whence he came.



# The Thunder God of Machu Pichu

--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

By the time I arrived in Lima, I was once again looking forward to the adventure that surely awaited me. I am told by other women that the pain of childbirth is one of the most excruciating experiences known to womankind, and yet, the joy of holding one's child in one's arms erases whatever pains may have accompanied its arrival. The thrill of adventure alleviates my pains similarly. I wonder if our very world is giving birth to a new era. Was the Great War simply the agonized pains of delivery to this new and wondrous aeon?

The city was abuzz with excitement. The APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana, or American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), a revolutionary political party, was on the rise and denouncing the corrupt regime. My assignment had taken me back into the political realm but in a decidedly unusual fashion.

This very modern reform party had an ancient power for an ally. The Peruvian military was at this very moment engaged with followers of Huascar, high priest of the Incan thunder-god Illapu. While the people of the cities rallied for equal rights for all Peruvian citizens, the Indians in the highlands of the Andes Mountains took to the old faith, rejecting Catholicism as the religion of Pizarro.

Following my interview with a leader of the splinter faction of APRA allied with Huascar, I attempted to find some way up to Machu Pichu. Official channels proved unavailable, for obvious reasons. Less official channels seemed equally unhelpful. No pilot, for love or money, wanted to get close to that ridge of the Andes. So, I purchased a powerful telescope and trekked on my own to a nearby peak. From my vantage point, I could make out some details of the city.

I had seen pictures of Machu Pichu when I was at university. It was the ruins of an old city, one whose masters had lived their lives out centuries ago. The new owners had renovated. Walls were whole. Temples had been rebuilt and covered with fresh flowers. Natives dressed in primitive outfits walked to and fro, carrying machine guns. Though their cause was ancient, their weaponry looked decidedly modern.

A battle raged at the outskirts of the ancient city. Government troops were shooting it out with the rebel forces. The rebels had the advantage of the terrain, but even I could tell they were outgunned.

Then, the magic happened. The cloudy sky erupted with thunderbolts, as if Zeus himself had been angered. The government troops scattered. I panned the telescope about and saw in a three-sided temple a glowing figure. I can only assume it was Huascar. A vortex of energy surrounded him, one that flashed in time with the lightning.

Suddenly, I felt the hairs on my arm stand on end. I looked up and saw the thunderheads roiling across the sky in my direction. I dove away from the telescope seconds ahead of the lightning. The thunder that followed nearly deafened me. The telescope was left a melted mass of metal and glass.

I quickly retreated down the mountain slope, hoping that Huascar would not decide to send an avalanche down on me.

Mister Mercer, I hope that whoever you send to follow up on this investigation has some method of dealing with this mad god.



--interview by Sarah Gettel with leader of the APRA splinter faction allied with Huáscar, granted on the condition of anonymity.

Sarah Gettel: Thank you for allowing this interview.

APRA: It is my pleasure, Miss Gettel. I only hope that you will be able to relay our words to the rest of the world, so that they may know the struggles of our peoples.

Gettel: I would be pleased to relay whatever you wish, but first, I wish to discuss Huáscar.

APRA: Yes, he is a valued ally to our cause. He is our king once again made flesh.

Gettel: He's reincarnated?

APRA: That is your word for it. Long ago, the two brothers Huáscar and Atahualpa made war to determine who would rule the Inca empire. Huáscar was the rightful heir, but his brother Atahualpa controlled a large army. The two brothers fought to become the Inca — the king. Though Atahualpa was the victor, the war weakened the country so much that, when Pizarro came, our people were too weak to fight. Thus began a cycle of foreign domination that has led us to today's corrupt power structure.

Gettel: And this new Huáscar is the reincarnation of the dead brother.

APRA: He has not made known how or when he realized who he once was, but his powers demonstrate his divine heritage. Acting on the directions of his past life, he fashioned the Spear of Illapu, our thunder god. With its magic, he controls the very forces of nature. The thunder and lightning are his to command.

Gettel: And why did Huáscar and his followers take over Machu Pichu?

APRA: Was it not once ours, as this land was once ours? It is a symbol to our people to rise up and take back our country!

Gettel: So, when did your organization contact his cult?

APRA: I do not like the word "cult." Does your Pope lead a cult as well? It was with the help of APRA that Machu Pichu was retaken. We have people all over this great land who sympathize with our cause. They told us of his power and his desires to return this land to the true, Incan people and send the heirs of Pizarro back to their homeland, with lightning chasing them every step of the way. We realized that we could work together.

Gettel: Thank you for that clarification. Please, tell me more about Huáscar.

APRA: He is not just royalty, but a divine being. His power radiates from him, like the electricity in the air before a storm. One cannot help but look at him and *know* that he carries the blood of gods and kings in his veins. His voice commands an army. His strength is that of the hurricane. With his aid, Peru will be free.

Gettel: What does he want to do with Peru once it's free?

APRA: Do?

Gettel: I mean, what are his goals? Is Huáscar going to set up a democracy?

APRA: That is so Western of you. He is not interested in democracy or communism. He wishes a return to the old ways, with him ruling as a wise and just king.



# The Hidden Pyramid

--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

With only a slight course change (thanks to the good Doctor Zorbo's zeppelin armada), I arrived in Cairo none the worse for wear. The timing was somewhat fortunate, as it gave me extra time to refresh my memories of Egypt. Though I had always been fascinated by tales of pharaohs and pyramids as a girl, most of my recollections were of fact, not legend, and legend was the order of the day.

The stories say that the Pharaoh Akhenaton and his wife Nefertiti were heretics. During Akhenaton's reign, he elevated the worship of Aton, his personal sun-god, to a much higher role in the Egyptian pantheon. This religious turmoil enveloped the whole country. The tale goes on to say that the Pharaoh's sins had offended the gods to such a degree that, following his burial, his entire tomb vanished in a sandstorm, "taken into the heavens to face the gods' displeasure in person." So powerful was the curse that the priests destroyed all records of the Pharaoh, so as not to be taken as well. Only secondhand tales from merchants and Roman travelers survived, and their accounts were sketchy at best.

It appears, my friend, that we are once again confronted by a legend come to life. A contact forwarded me this story, told to him by a desert nomad.

"The winds howled that night, as if the damned had escaped Hell itself. The wind had teeth, biting through our tents. Two men drowned miles away from water, the sand choking the life out of them as surely as a hand around the throat. With the dawn, the storm returned to the hell from whence it came. But as I rubbed the grit from my eyes, I fell to my knees in shock. Where there had been only open sand and desert, there now stood a pyramid, one the likes of which I had never seen before.

"I had traveled much of the land. I was there when the white men opened up the tomb of Pharaoh Tut-ankh-amen two years ago. This pyramid was... new. It stood out in the middle of the desert, gleaming as if the pyramid itself were made of solid gold. The stones had not been worn down by the winds of time. The corners were sharp, as if they had been quarried yesterday. My tribe spent the morning walking about the pyramid, watching with wonder and awe. None of us dared venture inside, even if we could have found an unsealed entrance. I alone would even touch the stones.

"I am no fool. I decided we should ride to the next town and tell the people there of our discovery. I had hoped we would even be rewarded.

"While telling our tale in the town, an old man made the sign of protection and then told us how the young Pharaoh Akhenaton had been accursed by the gods. Of my tribe, only my son and I were brave enough to lead an American archeologist back to the pyramid. I confess I was afraid as well, but Westerners paid many of my people large amounts of money to take them to places such as this. The sandstorm had destroyed most of our possessions, and we needed the money to survive the year.

"By the time we returned to the hidden pyramid, something even more wondrous had happened! People were there. As the sun rose,



we saw the people, dressed as I had seen them in the museum -- as our people did thousands of years ago. They chanted a name. 'Nefertiti,' they cried, as if in prayer. At the tip of the pyramid, a man kneeled before a young girl, barely old enough to marry. The sun crested above the horizon, and the man crowned the woman. She stood up and spoke. Though we were almost a mile away, we could hear her voice as plainly as you hear my own.

'She spoke in the language of our ancestors, which I am fortunate enough to understand. 'Behold, with the arrival of Aton's gaze, I am become Nefertiti. I am your pharaoh. As we have reclaimed this pyramid, which our ancestors built to honor false gods, so shall we reclaim all of Egypt, past and future, into the eternal Now. Kneel before me!' The man at her feet bowed, as did the men surrounding the pyramid. 'Who are these interlopers at my coronation?' she demanded.

'The American wanted to stay and talk with them. My people did not survive this long in the desert by staying where we were unwelcome. We fled. As we rode away, I turned back to see the archaeologist. He had run toward the pyramid, the fool. Though we were miles away, we could still hear his screams, carried on the warm desert winds. Offer me all the money you wish. No money can purchase a life.'

Once in Cairo, I looked up my father's old friend at the Cairo Museum of Antiquities. He gave me a map, which I am including with my package of notes and documents. The desert tribesman would not return to the Hidden Pyramid, but he was decent enough to describe its location. Doctor Aazhang corroborated the description with an ancient map, lacking only the context in which to place the location of the pyramid.

Dr. Aazhang informed me that the Cult of the Sun-Disk has grown in the months since then. The cult holds certain rather heretical beliefs, but it has taken hold of the people, emboldened by England's grant of their independence. Dr. Aazhang fears that the cultists will seize power in the uncertainty of these times. While as an Egyptologist, he is certainly interested in examining the ancient relics wielded by the cult's forces, he has no desire to turn the clock back to centuries before Christ's birth.

While researching the cult, I kept my ear to the ground and learned another point of interest to the Society. The Cult of the Sun-Disk is searching for certain artifacts. Its agents broke into the Cairo Museum of Antiquities just last week and stole the Scepter of Ra, while leaving behind untold riches, not to mention older pieces. My contacts tell me that the cult is not just active in Egypt, but that its minions are abroad, searching for other ancient artifacts. What the cultists' purpose is or even which artifacts they seek to find is, as of this moment, beyond me. But if Akhenaton has such powers presently, what dark powers will she unlock from the ancient relics of Khem?

## The Beasts of Devil's Pass

--dispatch by Sarah Gettel

Following my misadventures against the Ubiquitous Dragon in the Forgotten Temple of the Hungry Ghosts, I was more than ready to leave China. I traveled west and eventually boarded the famed Orient Express. With only a brief stopover in London, I was



heading home. The miles of the journey caught up with me, and I paused to enjoy the European luxury of this most wonderful train.

Soon after we stopped in Budapest to add a few more passengers, I saw a familiar face. Doctor Woodrow Roman of London. He is one of the world's foremost experts on folklore. However, when I saw the good doctor, I almost didn't recognize him. His once dark hair was whiter than the teeth of Doctor Shark.

"What happened, Woody?" I asked.

Dr. Roman started when I called his name, and I thought for a moment the good doctor would faint. He whipped around, reaching into his coat pocket. He paused when he saw me and quickly hustled me into his stateroom. "Dear God, Sarah, he was right." He smiled and shook my hand. I felt something cold in his palm and looked down. Before I could blink, he held my palm up to his scrutiny. In his hand, I saw the small crucifix he'd palmed. "Thank God," he breathed.

"What is going on?"

"Just a moment," he said. "I will tell you everything soon." As I watched, Dr. Roman hung a crucifix on the doorknob and draped a wreath of garlic cloves from his satchel across the crack at the base of the door. He slumped into his seat. "Safe, for now." He pulled his pocket-watch from his waistcoat and tapped it. "We must be off," he whispered as if in prayer. With a lurch, the train lumbered forward. "Thank you, God."

"Very funny, Woodrow," I said. "Who told you I was coming? This is a grand joke."

"Oh, Sarah, I wish to God it were a joke."

"Budapest. Crosses. Garlic. Hair turned white. Let me guess. You've met a Walachian prince named Vlad who wants to purchase some land in London."

"It is no joke!" he hissed. "It is only by that devil's leave that I am still alive."

"Very well. Tell me your story. I have seen many amazing things in my journeys of the past year. I am ready to believe you."

"That is the devil's greatest trick," he said. "Nobody will believe me. They think I am mad, having read too much Stoker as a youth. They say that I've come to believe the legends I study." He turned to look at me, and with the conviction of the certain or the mad, he said, "Vampires walk the earth."

"I was preparing a book comparing the historical Vlad Tepes to the fictional Dracula. With my research complete, I was ready for fieldwork. I had been to Transylvania during the War and knew enough of the local polyglot of languages to get by. My first stop was, naturally, Castle Dracula, in the Borgo Pass. Night was falling, so I made to the nearby town of Bistrita for the evening. The town was locked up tight, and the local inn would not open, no matter how hard I rapped on the door. Dejected, I returned to my car and resigned myself to another evening of sleeping in the back seat."

"Day broke, and I realized why no one had answered the door. The town was deserted. I wondered what economic hardships had caused this little hamlet to fold up. I also confess I wondered how I would find people to interview with nobody home. I decided to travel to the castle to at least get some photographs. As I walked the streets, something in the air raised the hairs on the



back of my neck. I felt as if I was walking among ghosts. I whistled a tune to distract myself and continued my walk. But I felt hidden eyes watching me.

'When I reached the castle, my first thought was that someone must have repaired the damage done to the castle by the earthquake of 1913, because the tower that reportedly fell into the River Arges was in fine repair. This caused me to wonder, for why would the town be empty but the castle repaired?

'As I reached the front gate, I heard a distant sound carried on the frosty winds. It was the howl of a wolf. By this time, my imagination was getting the better of me, and I wondered if it was one of Dracula's 'children of the night.'

'I looked out at the magnificent view from the foot of the wall and wondered if Tepes himself had stood there, hundreds of years ago. As I turned back, I saw another figure up on the castle wall. He screamed in Romanian, 'Flee,' and leaped from the battlements. I rushed to his side. The poor soul was in dire straits.

'I will get a doctor,' I assured him, though I had no idea where to find one.

'Leave this place,' he gasped. 'The devil walks the land. The devil flies by night.' With that, the wretch died. I reached for his neck to check his pulse and felt something there that caused my own skin to crawl. I gently turned the poor man's head and saw it. Two puncture wounds. Thoughts of science fled from my mind, and I was once again a caveman, scared by thunder in the night.

'I ran to my car as fast as my legs would carry me. In the distance, I heard the wolves howl again, this time closer than before. Thankfully, my car started on the first try and I tore down the twisting roads of the Borgo Pass as if the devil himself were chasing me.

'Just as my heart began to resume its normal patterns, the mists parted, and a man appeared in the road. He was tall, with a bushy mustache, just as I had seen in countless paintings. I swerved, and my car smashed into a tree. I lost consciousness for a moment and came to hearing the sounds of twisting metal. The man with the mustache tore the door off my car as if it were tissue paper. I halfheartedly struggled, but he yanked me from my car like a child with a rag doll.

'In heavily accented English, he told me, 'Do not come here. This is not a place for man to go. This is a place of darkness.' He smiled, and I could see the razor sharp fangs in his mouth. 'It is my home.' The man tossed me to the ground and said, 'Go now. I see that you will soon meet an old friend. She is collecting stories. Tell her... Tell her that she and her masters are not welcome here. They should stay away. Tell her your story. Tell her of this night and the things you will see. Run now, as fast as you can. You will not die this night, though I cannot promise further mercy.' The man gestured for me to rise. On shaky limbs, I did as ordered.

'That night, I ran because the devil himself was chasing me. That night, I saw things in the woods. They chased me but never attacked. I fear, had I slowed for even an instant, I would have been killed. The things I saw. Horrific creatures that were half man and half something else. Naked beast-women covered with bushy black hair. Hungry tree roots reached for my feet, tripping me



and slicing my legs. I could only think that the smell of blood would drive the beasts beyond their dark master's control. Thank God that the dark prince's will was strong.

"Every creature that ever shambled through my nightmares. They were there, Sarah. Every single one of them!

"As dawn broke, I found a small church. As I entered, I heard the man's voice again. It told me: 'Don't believe everything you read, Doctor Roman.' I slammed the door shut and fell to the floor. In the morning, the priests coming in for morning Mass found me. My hair was white and my story mad, but I was alive. And now that I have seen my old friend collecting stories, I know my usefulness may be at an end. I can only hope that the devil has forgotten about me."

I escorted Dr. Roman to the club car. He refused to tell any other stories of that horrific night but watched the countryside, illuminated by pale moonlight.

Later that night, Woodrow left for the head. I did not see him again, though I had the train stopped and searched from engine to caboose. To this day, I do not know if I believe a bloodsucking beast that walks like a man rules the Borgo Pass. But with all of the other wild adventures I have had, is a realm of monsters less incredible?





Looking Ahead-

## A Vision for the Future

Maxwell,

I cannot help but look at today's circumstances and think of them as harbingers of things to come. The modest array of talents we've gathered is but a trifle when compared to the future that lies before us. Imagine the possibilities inherent in the technology and gifts we've developed in the few short years since Hammersmith's experiment. Telluric energy is the answer to everything we could possibly imagine, if only we are willing to grasp it. (1)

The horrors of last decade's Great War are behind us. Now it is time to look at how we can use our talents to shape the future. I do not simply refer to the next few years, but perhaps the next century. Can you imagine what the world could be in a matter of 20 years? If we could understand the specifics of Dr. Hammersmith's experiment and duplicate it, we could activate the telluric potential in any human fortunate enough to have it. (2)

As matters exist today, with the Ron Society's secretive existence, I cannot help but think that you and your companions ignore the potential inherent in your various gifts. You have at your disposal scientific competence never before seen on Earth, as well as some of the most influential people in society. With the former's knowledge and the latter's resources, we could bring about a golden age (3) — a future where disease and famine are simply fading nightmares and war is something that exists only in children's games. (4)

Without our guidance, humanity is certainly still destined for greatness but with more strife and stumbling along the way. I foresee the potential for at least one more war. That war may lead to global peace but at great cost. Humanity, without the (5) benefit of our leadership, will come to the truths necessary for its prosperity, but there is no guarantee that they will understand what they've found. Few have the moral sophistication — even among the truly civilized European nations and the United States — to grasp their full potential without perverting it in some way. (6)


My gravest concern in this matter is the simple fact that leaving the power to make important decisions in the hands of hoi polloi will dilute those decisions, to the point that society will simply be a morass of conflicting agendas with no sense of direction or purpose. If the power to make these decisions clearly lies in the hands of those few qualified to make them, this will not happen, and we can direct society's growth in a positive and meaningful fashion. (7)

I would stand beside you, whichever path you choose. If you and your Society cannot grasp the brass ring that I can plainly see — and I am certain you see it as well — I cannot stand openly with you. I will not oppose you, but I cannot be a part of Ron. I know that you also wish to see a finer world, just as I know that you prefer to use subtler means to achieve that goal. I believe that your way will offer too little, too late — that it will lead to a ruinous future with little hope for us all. I ask that (8) you consider taking the path I offer you here and accept the destiny that was thrust upon us all in 1922.

Sincerely,

Michael Donighal





## Considerations for Moderation

Michael,

I can't agree that the simple possession of power grants any of us touched by telluric rays the right to interfere in humanity's destiny. At least, not beyond minimizing the interference from others similarly gifted. How many times in history has a man believed himself to be destined for great things, only to bring needless sorrow and bloodshed? Were Caesar's last thoughts as he saw Brutus' betrayal those of the empire carved or the life he wasted in its pursuit? I don't want history to look back on us as name us conquerors, and conquerors is what we'll be if we do as you suggest.

I've included a copy of your letter to better reference my rebuttals to your points. Please, don't take offense at this. I value your counsel, and I respect your wishes remain separate from the Aeon Society.

**One:** I shouldn't have to remind you that none of us yet fully understand the telluric energy or the lasting effects it's had on the world. While we can see its immediate effects, we don't know what will happen in the next 10, 50 or 100 years. We've already seen a few Inspired who are not exactly responsible examples of humanity - what will be like in 10 years?

**Two:** Don't get too carried away with your enthusiasm, Michael. Telluric rays don't grant ethical or moral thinking. For every person so empowered with good moral fiber, at least two more will have selfish or criminal designs. Few, I think, will subscribe to your expressed utopian ideals. Of those who do, most will do so in hopes of personal gain at your expense.

**Three:** With at least some anonymity, we can afford to act without interference from others who won't understand our goals or wish to control us. If we reveal the Aeon Society's true nature, expect to see governments and businessmen seeking to sway us to their ends. This alone will sabotage your ideals.

**Four:** You ask to stunt society's growth. The future will bring what the future brings. Humanity must remain free to develop in its own way. The times ahead will be hard, but humanity will recover. The near future may be grim, but the far future brings wonders neither of us have yet imagined. If we seize history's reins, we will cripple humanity. What of human ambition when gods walk among men?

**Five:** If we see another war, it will beggar the Great War in death toll and sheer destruction. The weapons developed for the conflict will be unlike any seen before. If the Great War does not serve to show the futility of such terrible violence, the next war very well may do so. A second Great War may teach the world's people and leaders just how far is too far. Without the lessons of a second war, I fear for mankind's social development.

**Six:** Your point here applies just as surely to us as it does to any normal human. How often have you and I witnessed a human being granted the power to look into another's heart and soul, only to use that gift for personal gain and at great harm to others?

**Seven:** Direct society's growth? Perhaps in the same manner as the Japanese grow bonsai - stunted and deformed. The result may be pleasing to the eye, but the tree itself is forever prevented from its grandiose potential. Michael, you must realize that the best way for society to grow is to allow hoi polloi, as you call them, to make their own decisions and learn from them, right or wrong.

**Eight:** I cannot believe that a ruinous future will bring an end to hope. Wherever life continues, hope springs eternal. Even the greatest possible catastrophe can't lead to eternal ruin for all humanity. Men of vision are always present to help guide mankind out of whatever terrible state it finds itself in. History has shown this repeatedly - think on how much the world has improved in the years since the war, let alone in the past.

Michael, my friend, the mixture of drive and intelligence within you will lead you to great things. At some point in the future, you may find humanity's fate in your hands. If that time ever comes - and I pray, for your sake, that it never does - I can only ask that you make the right decision and let humanity prosper on its own terms.

With my warmest regards,  
Maxwell Anderson Mercer

*Maxwell Anderson Mercer*

AEON SOCIETY for Gentlemen  
"HOPE"



# ADVENTURE!

## TALES OF THE AEON SOCIETY

**THIS ISSUE:  
A HOW-TO GUIDE  
SO THAT YOU TOO  
CAN JOIN THE  
AEON SOCIETY**





# ADVENTURE!

## Book II: Rules

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# INTRODUCTION

**Adventure** is a game of pulp heroism set in the 1920s. It's a game about men and women who take action. They're visionaries, inventors, explorers, sages, scientists, mystics, and more. They come from every continent and from every stratum of society: princes and paupers, shopkeepers and mechanics made good, businessmen and heiresses turned to more exciting pursuits. **Adventure's** settings range from lofty skyscraper penthouses to squalid slums and sewers, from arctic wastelands to deep oceans to sweltering jungles. **Adventure** goes everywhere interesting — not always nice or safe, but never dull!

**Adventure** is a game about telling stories — epic stories on a grand scale. If you've played other roleplaying games, you should already be familiar with the idea. If not, this section explains what it all means.

In addition to the specific points mentioned here, there's a glossary in the **Appendix**. It explains a number of terms used in the rules that new players may not be familiar with.

## Roleplaying

**Adventure** is a *roleplaying* game: Players (that's you) assume the roles of central characters in an ongoing story. It's much like mixing improvisational theater with "cops and robbers." The make-believe you played as a child — imagining yourself as a knight in shining armor or a brightly clad superhero — was roleplaying. **Adventure** is simply a more sophisticated version of those childhood games.

Still, **Adventure** needs a few more rules than the playground did. "Got you!" "Did not!" "Did too!" is too simplistic for this sort of game. You and your friends make up the story, and the rules provide a framework to help keep everything on track. Rules guide the story, eliminating conflict over whether or not a character's actions are plausible. However, rules *don't* dictate or restrict the action. The point of **Adventure** is to have fun! So, rules give you the basic mechanics for play, but beyond that, the focus is on the story, on having a good time.

## The Storyteller

**Adventure** is a game, but it has more in common with theater than with card or board games. Most notably, one player, called the *Storyteller*, is a "director" of sorts. The Storyteller acts as a combination narrator and referee, creating the drama through which the players take their characters. As a Storyteller, you create the

environment in which the characters are placed. You are responsible for tying the story's disparate threads together and making sure the whole thing runs smoothly. Your most useful tools in balancing story and game are your imagination and the rules systems. The Storyteller's role is explored in detail in Chapter Seven: Roleplaying.

## The Players

While the Storyteller sets the stage for the game, the *players* take the stage and create the action there. As a player of **Adventure**, you create a character with a unique perspective in the tumultuous early 20th century. He could be a *daredevil*, a *mesmerist* or a *stalwart* — an adventurer, a *hero*. Whatever kind of adventurer you choose your character to be, you decide his actions over the course of the story. Everything you have your character say and do influences the world of **Adventure**. Your goal is to help your hero overcome the obstacles facing him. You deal with challenges in **Adventure** primarily through roleplaying, with some dice rolling thrown in when you don't know if the character succeeds in his attempt. Chapter Seven: Roleplaying contains more helpful advice on how to roleplay.

## The Characters

To play **Adventure**, you create a role and become that person within the game's context. Just like Harrison Ford taking on the role of Indiana Jones, you embody your character in the story. While the characters in a movie have a predetermined existence, the **Adventure** character you create develops however you want him to. You can have a character ready to go after about a half-hour. Even then, a character is nothing but a collection of numbers on paper until *you* breathe life into him. Character creation is covered in Chapter Two: Character.

## The Game

There are no "winners" or "losers" in **Adventure**, conventionally speaking. The idea is not to "beat" the other players; after all, cooperating with one another is often essential to your own character's survival. Nor is the goal to "beat" the Storyteller, since you all work together to create an entertaining story. In the end, the goal is the act of playing the game itself — to rise to the challenge, striving to overcome herculean odds with your talents, wits and courage.

Although this setting's focus is the struggle for power among those touched in some way by the mysterious zero-point energy, **Adventure** is designed for play-



ers to pursue any number of goals. Success in **Adventure** may come about for a number of reasons: defeating foes in the course of the story, achieving status within an organization, developing a previously untapped talent, uncovering a world-threatening plot... or simply having fun playing the game.

There is no preset "end" to a storytelling game. A story can last for a few hours or go on for weeks or months. The players take breaks between game sessions whenever they like. Each time they gather again, the story picks up just like another episode in an ongoing TV series or another chapter in a novel.

## The World of Adventure

Fundamentally, the world of **Adventure** is much like our own early 20th century. Assume that any facts you read in history books or on the Internet is the same in **Adventure**, unless explicitly noted otherwise in this book (or that the Storyteller tells you she's changed). Strange things happen, but future generations will dismiss most of them as hoaxes or misunderstandings or will simply ignore them. Even many people in the Adventure Era shrug off the more bizarre tales. Other challenges and solutions play out in secret. In many cases, this is because Earth isn't yet the global village we're used to today. Your characters' encounter with hyper-intelligent albino apes deep in the Congo may never be revealed to the world at large simply because CNN isn't around to record it. The tale may spread, but details may be lost or warped, and the whole thing could soon take on the shape of myth. At other times, your characters, or other agencies, may decide the world doesn't need to know just how close it came to apocalypse this time around. Some perils are just so outright strange and mysterious that it might be best to keep the specifics quiet until proper research can be done.

**Adventure** "officially" begins in the spring of 1924. Maxwell Anderson Mercer established the *Æon* Society for Gentlemen six months previously. This date is roughly 18 months after Hammersmith's experiment to collect and contain telluric radiation ended in disaster. That seminal event is the dawn of the Adventure Era, for the very energy Hammersmith hoped to capture radiates around — even through — the Earth. For the most part, the pseudoaetheric waves pass with no effect. Some small portions of the globe are affected, hidden pockets transformed into places lost to the mists of time or locales only ever experienced in the imagination. Rare individuals are also affected, forever changed by their exposure to Z-rays — though many never realize what force has touched them. These people often become adventurers, heroes and villains on a global scale. They are the Inspired.

The aftershocks of the Hammersmith event continue rippling subtly across the globe. Most people who know about the resulting changes it inspires are still strug-

gling to understand the full scope, not to mention just what impact the Z-waves are having on Earth and its denizens. *Æon* and other groups detailed earlier have operated, publicly or privately, for a little while now, pursuing a variety of agendas.

As a daredevil, a mesmerist or a stalwart, your character has been exposed to some portion of the strangeness flowing around the edges of the known world. Whether out of curiosity to discover the origin of his new talents, the thirst for knowledge or being drawn into events by forces beyond his understanding, your character delves into the new world hiding behind the known. Mysteries beckon, and you alone have the wit and talent to reveal the truth.

## The Future

**Adventure** completes the trio of White Wolf's *Æon* Continuum games. They occupy different eras of the same history, as well as different portions of a thematic trilogy.

**Trinity** is a science-fiction game, a far-future setting featuring evolved humans known as *psions* — the genetic descendents of **Adventure**'s own mesmerists. **Aberrant** is a superpowers game set just a few years after our own present day, focusing on tremendously powerful individuals called *novas* — a new incarnation of **Adventure**'s stalwarts. Daredevils exist in every era, but it is here in **Adventure** that they enjoy the spotlight.

According to the two subsequent games' timelines, most of the events from the Adventure Era fade into obscurity or legend by the end of the 20th century. Certain characters introduced in this book — most notably Max Mercer and Doctor Primoris — will continue to influence events in the *Æon* Continuum throughout the next two centuries. Still, you don't need **Trinity** or **Aberrant** to enjoy **Adventure**. And players and Storytellers familiar with either of those two games are free to include as much — or as little — of the "official" *Æon* Continuum metastory as they like. It's all up to you how you want to play it.

## Playing Aids

**Adventure** is designed for play around a table. You need little besides this book, some 10-sided dice (also called "d10s"), photocopies of the character sheet in the back of the book, pencils and paper for taking notes... and, of course, your imagination.

Other props can make the roleplaying experience more vivid. Mood lighting, music (soundtracks from the *Indiana Jones* films, *The Rocketeer* and the like are particularly appropriate), pictures from history books or *National Geographic*, scribbled notes or sketches — all can help make the game seem more real. Remember that props are just that; it's the *story* that matters.



## Live-Action

Live-action roleplaying is a natural outgrowth of the "tabletop" storytelling described above. Live-action is even more like improvisational theater. You don't just describe your character's actions; you "are" that character. You actually do what the character does (within reason — obviously, you shouldn't try swinging across a chasm on a rope or lifting the back end of a Buick). Whether it's simply walking across a room or facing down an enemy atop the Empire State Building, you are physically involved in the action. Imagination is still important, and the Storyteller may still interrupt events to describe objects and special situations.

You don't use dice in live-action games. Alternate rules (like those in *White Wolf's Mind's Eye Theatre* game products or simply the result of the Storyteller's judgment) replace dice. The method of adjudicating actions itself isn't important, as long as it's consistent, fair and fun for everyone.

### Rules of Live-Action

You must follow a few essential rules to ensure that live-action roleplaying is safe and enjoyable for all. These rules must be obeyed in any live-action activity; safety is always the primary concern.

- **Don't Touch:** Players may *never* actually strike or grapple one another. No combat should ever be performed — that's what the "dice" are for. If anyone gets too rambunctious, the Storyteller should call a timeout and remind everyone of the rules. Repeat offenders should be asked to leave, or the action should be returned to a tabletop roleplaying forum.

- **No Weapons:** No props can be used if they must touch another player to be effective. No real weapons or realistic-looking props (such as guns, swords or whips) of any sort are allowed at any time during live-action sessions.

- **Respect People Who Aren't Playing:** Play in a private area where only the players are around (your house, a reserved room on campus or a rented hall). *Never* perform live roleplay if passersby may be confused or frightened by the event. If non-players are around, understand that they probably have no idea what you're doing. Be discrete and considerate; respect their space, and don't force them to participate. Pausing to explain that you're playing a game is also a good idea.

- **Know When to Stop:** Remember: *It's just a game!* When anyone calls for a timeout, all action must cease immediately. If the game gets too intense for someone, it's time to stop.





# CHAPTER RULES ONE

The rules for **Adventure** are meant to level the playing field for everyone. The Storyteller can adjudicate most matters, deciding on her own whether or not characters accomplish the actions they attempt. But truly unbiased rulings need some standard so that everyone gets the same treatment.

**Adventure** requires only a few basic rules, but they can offer countless permutations. This chapter covers the essentials, such as rolling dice; more specific, detail-oriented rules are found in Chapter Six: Drama and elsewhere in the book. Don't worry about mastering everything at once — learn the basics and the rest will come naturally.

## Actions

**Adventure** is a game about action — so when a character does something, it's called taking an *action*. Speeches and conversations aren't considered actions as such, but just about everything else is, whether it's throwing a punch or translating an ancient language.

### Time

Even the simplest action takes time to attempt. "Game" time isn't always played out in real time. Over a four hour game session, a week, a month or even a year might pass in the game — or you might spend the entire episode detailing the events of an action-packed half-hour. **Adventure** uses six basic time units:

- **Turn:** The amount of time required for a fairly simple action. A turn lasts three seconds in combat; a turn lasting up to three minute is fine in less dramatic circumstances.
- **Scene:** A compact period of events that occurs in a single location, like in a movie. It takes as few or as many turns to resolve a scene as are necessary.
- **Episode:** An independent part of a story, virtually always played in one game session. An episode consists of a number of scenes interconnected by downtime, much like a chapter in a novel or an act in a play.
- **Story:** A complete tale, with an introduction, buildup and climax. A story can consist of a single episode, transpire over the course of a few episodes, or go on indefinitely. Also referred to as a story arc.
- **Series:** A collection of discrete story arcs that focus on the same characters. If a story is like a movie, a

series is like a movie franchise.

• **Downtime:** Time glossed over with description rather than played out. The Storyteller invokes downtime, for example, if she says, "You watch the abandoned building for five hours before the thieves arrive." Downtime lets you skim through trivial or tedious passages of time.

## Rolling Dice

Attempting an action is simple. Just tell the Storyteller what your character's trying to do and how he plans to go about it. Some actions — crossing a room or loading a revolver — are *automatic*: easy enough to be considered automatically successful. However, if your character is trying to get past a half dozen heavily muscled goons or trying to reload while dangling by one arm from a broken rope bridge, there's a chance he'll fail.

The Storyteller may decide if a given action succeeds or fails (usually for dramatic purposes). But the result is usually left to chance, by rolling dice. **Adventure** uses 10-sided dice, which you can find in any game store. A beginning character should need no more than 10 dice at a given time.

## Reflexive Actions

Sometimes, the Storyteller might decide a given feat isn't involved enough to count as a separate action, but still requires a dice roll. These feats are called *reflexive* because they're quick, reactive actions the character does more out of instinct than conscious intent — grabbing for a handhold when the floor gives way, glimpsing something being stuffed in a drawer and the like. Often, they are things that happen as a result of others acting upon the character. Reflexive actions keep the flow of action/reaction moving in a scene, rather than having to wait the three in-game seconds to respond to a minor chance event. Reflexive actions should seldom, if ever, be used in the thick of combat.

## Ratings

Although only your imagination limits your character's personality, his innate and learned aptitudes and abilities, or *Traits*, define his capabilities. These strengths and weaknesses affect the number of dice you roll and, thus, directly impact the chances of success.



Each Trait has a *rating*, a numerical score, which ranges from 1 to 5 (much like the “star” rating for movies and restaurants). A 1 indicates a poor or beginner level of skill; a 2 represents an average level of ability; a 5 indicates the absolute peak of human capability. Most characters’ Traits range from 1 to 3; a 4 indicates an exceptional person, while a 5 is especially noteworthy. A character can have a zero in a Trait, typically indicating a lack of skill in a given area. You record Trait ratings by filling in the appropriate number of dots on your character sheet.

|       |                      |
|-------|----------------------|
| x     | Abysmal/Untrained    |
| •     | Poor/Novice          |
| ••    | Average              |
| •••   | Good                 |
| ••••  | Exceptional          |
| ••••• | Superb/Human maximum |

## Dice Pools

Whenever you roll dice, you get one die for each dot in the Trait or Traits most suited to the task. The Storyteller decides which Traits are appropriate by choosing the *Ability*, or learned skill, that best covers the action being attempted. Each Ability is linked to an *Attribute*, or innate talent. When the Storyteller asks for an Ability roll, take your character’s Ability rating and add in the corresponding Attribute rating. The combination of Ability and Attribute ratings is called a *dice pool*.

**Example:** Annabelle Lee Newfield searches for Professor Dixon, who’s late for their rendezvous in Djakarta. Picking up his trail at the hotel is a standard Investigation attempt. Annabelle’s Investigation Ability of 3 is linked to her Perception Attribute of 3. Annabelle has a pool of six dice any time the Storyteller calls for an Investigation roll.

|                     |                        |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| PERCEPTION          | 00000                  |
| Awareness _____     | 00000 0 <span>5</span> |
| Investigation _____ | 00000 0 <span>6</span> |
| Navigation _____    | 00000 0 <span>3</span> |

So that you don’t have to add up the two Trait ratings each time you roll, use the square next to an Ability to record the total of its rating and its matching Attribute. The dice pool is the total number of dice you roll for a single task. Characters usually perform only one action in a turn, although your character may try for more (see “Multiple Actions” below).

Each dice pool derives from a single Ability + Attribute total and defaults to the appropriate Attribute if the character has no rating in an Ability. Dice pools figured from Personality Traits are the only exceptions (see below).

## Default Traits

If your character doesn’t have a rating in the necessary Ability, you *default* to the Attribute to which the Ability is linked. In the example above, if Annabelle didn’t have any rating in Investigation, her player would roll her score in Perception.

## Cross-Matching Abilities and Attributes

**Adventure’s** standard Ability/Attribute match-ups help streamline game play. The Storyteller may decide certain unusual circumstances call for a different Ability/Attribute match. If so, the Storyteller asks for a cross-matched roll by declaring the Ability and Attribute combination she feels is most suitable. This is the only time that the Storyteller need call for the Ability *and* the Attribute to be used. You then take the separate Ability and Attribute ratings (*not* the dice pool written next to the Ability) and add them together. This total is your dice pool for that particular roll.

**Example:** Whitley Styles faces off against an assassin from the Temple of the Red Blade. Styles wants to evaluate his foe’s fighting technique by observing the assassin’s stance and katas. The Storyteller thinks Martial Arts is appropriate, but the feat really calls for an Intelligence test. Instead of the normal Martial Arts dice pool [Martial Arts + Dexterity], Styles’ player combines the character’s Martial Arts 4 and Intelligence 3 for seven dice.

## Personality Traits

Certain Traits — Backgrounds, Willpower and Inspiration — don’t relate to physical or psychological capability and have no linked Abilities. You seldom make rolls based on Background ratings and usually roll Willpower and Inspiration as their own dice pools.

Willpower and Inspiration have permanent and temporary ratings. The *permanent* rating (designated by dots on the character sheet) usually stays the same. The character’s *temporary* rating (noted by the squares under the permanent score) can fluctuate during a story. Dice actions using Willpower and Inspiration are based on the character’s permanent score (the dots), not the temporary rating (the squares). Chapter Three: Traits discusses Personality Traits in more detail.

## Success and Failure

When you roll your character’s dice pool, you want each die to match or exceed the target number.



The target number is *always* 7. So each die that comes up a 7, 8, 9 or 0 (10) is considered a *success* — a favorable resolution. Conversely, if all the dice you roll come up less than 7, your action fails.

All you have to know when you roll is the number of successes you need. If you get at least the minimum quantity, you achieve your goal. The standard number of successes for any task is always one, unless the Storyteller says otherwise. *Extra* successes may generate additional effects — at the very least, they mean your character performs the feat with great flair. See “Complications” for information regarding easier and more difficult actions.

| Total Successes Rolled | Degree of Success |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1                      | Standard          |
| 2                      | Superior          |
| 3                      | Remarkable        |
| 4                      | Astonishing       |
| 5                      | Phenomenal        |

**Example:** *Annabelle Lee Newfield finds Professor Dixon locked up in a small shed and his new portable Z-wave resonator stolen! The Professor groggily points through the tiny window at a man heading across the crowded marketplace. There’s no time to free Dixon and recover the resonator, so Annabelle sneaks after the thief. The Storyteller has Miss Newfield’s player roll Stealth; Annabelle has Stealth 2 and Dexterity 4, making a Stealth pool of six dice. She scores 1, 4, 5, 7, 7, 9 — three successes. Annabelle slips easily through the throng after her quarry.*

## Complications

It isn’t difficult to get at least one success, even with only a couple of dice. If your group is heavily into roleplaying, the simple rolls described above move the game along with a minimum of distraction. The following options provide further complexity, while keeping things as streamlined as possible.

### Botches

Normally, if none of your dice comes up 7 or higher, your character just fails. If any die on such a failed roll comes up 1, you’ve *botched*. Not only does your character fail the action on a botch, he does so spectacularly! The specific circumstances of a botch are up to the Storyteller, but they should affect the character adversely and relate to the action being attempted. However, as long as you roll *at least* one success (a 7 or higher), you ignore any 1s.

**Example:** *Annabelle follows the thief down the narrow side street. The Storyteller asks for an Awareness roll. Annabelle has five dice in her Awareness dice pool (Awareness 2 + Perception 3), and her player gets 1, 3, 4, 6, 6 — a botch. The Storyteller decides Annabelle is worried about losing the thief and hurries to catch up — only to run into him as she dashes around the corner!*

## Automatic and Free Successes

Your character may be so skilled in something that you don’t need to roll for it. At the Storyteller’s discretion, your character has an *automatic success* if his dice pool for an action is seven dice or more — you don’t even need to roll. A standard success isn’t enough in some tricky circumstances, though, and you might want to roll anyway for extra successes. This rule should never be used in stressful situations, particularly in combat.

You may spend a Willpower point for a “free” success. This success is *in addition* to any successes from rolling dice, but you must spend Willpower prior to your roll. You may spend one Willpower point per turn to gain a free success.

You may also spend Inspiration to affect your successes under certain circumstances. See “Inspiration” (p. 152) for more information.

## Difficulty and Difficult Actions

Succeeding in most actions requires only one success. Some tasks, such as making a trick shot or performing delicate surgery, can be more challenging. The Storyteller makes that distinction when appropriate, designating the number of successes you must roll to succeed. A roll’s *difficulty* is always listed as the number of *additional* successes needed beyond the standard one. So a difficulty penalty of two (written “+2 difficulty”) means you must get a total of *three* successes. The harder the action being attempted, the more successes are necessary. Any extra successes you get *beyond* the difficulty indicate your character does an even more outstanding job than required.

| Difficulty Rating | Degree of Difficulty |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 0                 | Standard             |
| +1                | Tough                |
| +2                | Challenging          |
| +3                | Difficult            |
| +4                | Critical             |

**Example:** *The thief flees, scrambling up a crumbling wall and across the rooftops! Scaling the treacherous stonework is tricky; the Storyteller applies +1 difficulty if Annabelle wants to follow. With an Athletics dice pool of 10, her player likes her chances. She must roll two successes and gets 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9. With two extra successes after spending two to beat the difficulty, Annabelle hauls herself handily up the wall.*

## Extended Actions

Tasks that take sustained effort require multiple successes and often take more than one turn to accomplish. Successes rolled each turn are cumulative; you can keep trying for more until you gather the required amount or until you botch. If you botch during an *extended action*, the Storyteller may decide you lose a “saved” success for each botch or that you lose them all and must start again — or even that you messed up so badly that you can’t try again!



Extended actions are more complicated than standard actions; they should seldom be employed in the middle of intense roleplaying. The action in the game should reflect what types of rolls are needed, not the other way around.

**Example:** Annabelle tossed her pocket knife to Professor Dixon before she ran off. He uses it to pry the hinges from the wooden door. The Storyteller decides this is close enough to lockpicking that it requires a Legerdemain roll. Dixon must get five successes in an extended action to jimmy the hinges enough to escape. The Professor has a Legerdemain dice pool of four, so his player rolls four dice. He gets 1, 4, 5, 10. The top hinge creaks a bit but doesn't give. On his next turn, the player rolls 7, 8, 9, 9. The four successes this turn plus the one from the previous turn are just enough to lever the door off its hinges.

## Multiple Actions

Your character normally gets one action in a turn, but you may split that action into more than one task. The total number of "sub-actions" determines how many dice you subtract from the first task, and each action after the first loses an additional (cumulative) die beyond that amount. So, if your character tries to do three things in a turn, you subtract three dice from the first task's dice pool, four from the second and five from the third. If the total multiple actions bring the dice pool for any one task to zero, your character can't attempt it.

**Example:** While leaping to the next roof, Annabelle throws a handy piece of masonry at the thief's legs to knock him down. This makes two actions: leaping, then throwing. The Storyteller thinks the move is cinematic and lets Annabelle grab the stone as part of the throw, but adds +1 difficulty since it targets the thief's lower body. With no points in Might, Annabelle defaults to her Strength 3. Subtracting two from that dice pool, her player rolls one die for: 5. She takes away three from her Athletics 10 dice pool for the throw — but adds one from her Trick Shot Knack (which also reduces the difficulty to zero; see below for more on Knack use) — rolling eight dice for: 2, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10. Annabelle doesn't make the jump, but the masonry hits the thief's legs!

The Storyteller allows a reflexive Athletics roll for Annabelle to grab the roof's edge. Instead of going through damage and balance issues with the thief, the Storyteller decides it makes for a better story if the stone didn't do any real damage, but was enough to knock him down.

## Resisted Actions

Sometimes your character's efforts oppose another's, such as in a tug of war. During resisted actions, opposing players roll using the appropriate Traits. If you score more successes than your opponent does, your character succeeds at his action first. The amount

your opponent rolled then subtracts from your total successes, and whatever remains applies to the action itself. So, even if your opponent can't beat you, she can diminish your efforts.

**Example:** Annabelle scrambles up and reaches the thief as he's regaining his feet. They both grab the satchel with the Z-wave resonator. The Storyteller declares Might rolls all around. They're evenly matched with no Might Ability and Strength 3. The Storyteller rolls for the thief, getting 3, 5, 8. Annabelle's player rolls 4, 8, 9. While the thief resists her, Annabelle still yanks the satchel away.

Some actions are extended and resisted. One opponent must collect a certain number of successes to win. All successes rolled in a single turn above the opponent's own are added together. The first opponent to collect a designated number of successes wins the contest.

**Example:** Now Annabelle has the thief chasing her! This is a standard pursuit (see p. 189), but the Storyteller doesn't want to drag it out. He has both parties roll resisted Athletics rolls. If the thief gets three successes first, he catches Annabelle; if Annabelle gets three successes first, she gets away. In the first turn, the Storyteller rolls for the thief (Athletics 4 dice pool) for 3, 4, 5, 9; Annabelle's player (Athletics 10 dice pool) scores an abysmal 1, 1, 3, 4, 4, 4, 5, 6, 6, 8. In the second turn, the Storyteller rolls 3, 7, 7, 8; Annabelle's player gets 1, 2, 4, 5, 5, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10. Even up by the third turn, the Storyteller rolls 4, 7, 8, 9. Annabelle is caught unless her player negates at least one success. Annabelle's player gets an astounding 1, 2, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, 10, 10, 10! With so many successes left, the Storyteller decides Annabelle makes it to the street and disappears into the crowded market.

## Teamwork

Characters can combine successes, generally during an extended action. At the Storyteller's discretion, two or more players can roll separately and total their successes. While teamwork is effective in repairing devices, collecting information or combat, the tag-team approach can be confusing in social situations.

**Example:** Annabelle Lee Newfield finds Professor Dixon, and they head to the hotel to pack up and get out of town. Unfortunately, the thief and a couple of burly underlings track them down. The thief wants the thugs to break down the door. The Storyteller decides they must get four successes total in an extended action. The first thug (Might 5 dice pool) gets 1, 5, 7, 8, 9. His buddy (Might 6 pool) gets 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 10! The Storyteller decides the locking plate shatters and the door practically flies off its hinges as the criminals burst into the suite!

## Second Chances

Failure is frustrating. **Adventure** reflects this fact by allowing the Storyteller to increase the successes



needed for any action you try again after an initial failure. So if picking a lock fails the first time, a character's disappointment could distract him the second time, as designated with a +1 difficulty. If the character fails yet again, things continue to escalate....

This rule shouldn't be invoked in combat situations. Missing a target isn't surprising under such circumstances, considering that everyone is dodging about, ducking for cover and generally not being polite enough to stand still.

## Knack Use

Inspired characters have unusual talents called Knacks. These powers can give a character special bonuses, adding to his dice pool when performing a stealth maneuver, increasing his soak against attacks and the like. Some Knacks must be activated by spending Inspiration points.

**Example:** *Seasoned adventurers, Annabelle and Professor Dixon are surprised only for an instant when the thugs burst in. It's time for combat, so everyone rolls Initiative. Annabelle goes first. She wants to wrap her whip around the first thug and then yank it loose, spinning him into his friend. It's a tricky multiple action: first an attack to grab the thug with the whip, then an attack at +2 difficulty (due to the leverage and momentum required to "throw" him at his compatriot). The Storyteller also deems Annabelle's Trick Shot Knack may apply.*

Annabelle's player subtracts two dice from her impressive Melee 9 dice pool for the first attack for: 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9. She wraps the goon up nicely. She takes three dice from the second attack, but Trick Shot gives her a number of dice equal to the maneuver's difficulty, adding two dice to her Melee pool! Plus, the Knack cuts the difficulty in half, so she faces only a +1 difficulty on the second attack.

Plus, since this is a grab, the Storyteller decides the two extra successes from her first attack may apply to her second attack as "momentum." Annabelle's player adds them happily and rolls the resulting 10 dice for 1, 2, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 8, 9, 0. Annabelle Lee Newfield gives a mighty yank on the rawhide whip, sending the surprised thug crashing directly into his pal!

## The Golden Rule

There are further rules expansions in the following chapters, but what you just read gives you the nuts and bolts. Above and beyond anything else, the most important rule of **Adventure** is simple:

If you don't like it, *change it*.

The story is more important than any single rule or even the published setting. If the systems get in the way, ignore or change them. If you like your idea better than what's here, disregard the text. This book is full of nothing more than guidelines. Feel free to use, alter or ignore any portion of it as you see fit. After all, it's *your* story.

## Examples of Rolls

This rules system is designed with flexibility in mind. The following examples should give you an idea of what can come up in a game. The entire list of Attributes and Abilities is detailed in Chapter Three: Traits.

- Sneaking through the Ubiquitous Dragon's Hong Kong warehouse, your character stumbles across a guard. Roll Initiative to see who reacts first.
- You want your character to conduct herself flawlessly at a formal dinner in the pasha's royal palace. Roll Etiquette at +1 difficulty to avoid her making a faux pas.
- The trap door is locked from the other side. Roll Might at +2 difficulty to have your character pry it open.
- Your character's been riding across the desert all night, hoping to reach Cairo by dawn. Roll Endurance to avoid him nodding off.
- A pair of the Doctor Zorbo's guards question your character about his "borrowed" uniform. You could roll Command to order them away or try Savvy to offer them a bribe.
- Your character can't get the girl to tell her what's wrong. Roll Rapport to get a sense of what's troubling the child.
- Your character must jump across the subway track while avoiding the mobster's gunshots. Roll Athletics at +2 difficulty.
- Your character speaks Mandarin, but her Cantonese is rusty. Roll Linguistics at +2 difficulty to figure out what the shopkeeper is yelling about.
- Despite your character's best efforts, it seems this palooka won't listen to reason. Roll Brawl or Martial Arts to show him the back of your character's hand.
- The thugs outnumber your character five to one, and they're not in the mood to talk. Roll Intimidation at +3 difficulty for her to impress upon them that this will hurt them more than it'll hurt her.
- Your character bursts into the cockpit — the pilot is dead, and the plane is hurtling directly toward a mountain! Roll Pilot for him to steer the craft out of harm's way.
- Your character's never seen a device like this before. Roll Engineering at +1 difficulty to determine its origin.
- A pair of autogyros thunders from behind the castle wall. Roll Firearms to have your character fire the Lewis gun right back at them.
- Whose story will the Treasury agent believe — your character's or her rival's? You both make resisted Perform rolls.
- That amulet belongs in a museum! Roll Legendreman at +2 difficulty for your character to slip it from the sultan's wrist.
- Your character could swear she's seen hieroglyphs like this before. Roll Academics for her to recall where.



# CHAPTER

## CHARACTER

### TWO

To play **Adventure**, you'll need a character (unless you're the Storyteller, in which case pay special attention to Chapter Seven: Roleplaying). The big question is, "What kind of character do I want to play?" Subsequent chapters go into specifics about different character aspects. This chapter takes you through the character creation process itself, step by step, with helpful references to the following chapters where appropriate.

Many players create characters as surrogates: "If I lived in this place at this time, what would I be like, or what would I want to be like?" Some base their characters on favorite protagonists from fiction, while others try to create believable characters out of whole cloth. It helps to ask the Storyteller what type of series he has in

mind. If he plans a continent-hopping exploration of hidden kingdoms and lost relics, you're better off discarding a Dark Urban Avenger concept. The Storyteller may have no idea what he wants to run (or he may have a nefarious scheme that will work well with all sorts of characters). In this case, you certainly have more freedom. You might also consult the other players to avoid stepping on one another's schticks (see "Creating a Team," p. 212, for more information). If the group already has two intrepid physicists, you may wish to change your focus (or get another player to change *his* mind instead).

In the end, there is no set method. All of these schemes work just fine; use what works for you and your friends.





## Character Creation Table:

This chart covers the character-creation process in short form; refer to the accompanying sections for details. Available points are listed where relevant.

### Phase One: Genesis

This portion outlines the process of creating a normal person from the 1920s.

#### •Step One: Concept (p. 117)

Choose origin, Nature and allegiance

#### •Step Two: Select Attributes (p. 134)

Prioritize the three areas: Physical, Mental and Social

Choose primary Attributes (6 points)

Choose secondary Attributes (4 points)

Choose tertiary Attributes (3 points)

#### •Step Three: Select Abilities (p. 138)

Choose desired Abilities (23 points)

No Ability higher than 3

Calculate dice pools

#### •Step Four: Select Backgrounds (p. 144)

Choose desired Backgrounds (6 points)

#### •Step Five: Phase One Finishing Touches

Record initial Willpower (3), Inspiration (0), Initiative (Dexterity + Wits), movement (walk Dex + 2 m, run Dex + 12 m, sprint [Dex x 3] + 20 m)

Spend bonus points (15 points)

### Bonus Points

| Trait                    | Cost per dot |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Attribute                | 5            |
| Ability                  | 2            |
| Specialty                |              |
| (max. three per Ability) | 1            |
| Background               | 1            |
| Willpower                | 2            |
| Initiative               | 1            |

### Phase Two: Transformation

This section explains how you change your character from a normal person into an Inspired adventurer!

#### •Step One: Inspiration

Choose your character's transformation type: heroic, psychic or dynamic

#### •Step Two: Define the Inspiration

Choose primary Inspiration facet: Intuitive, Reflective or Destructive

#### •Step Three: Transformation Points

Spend 13 transformation points on Inspiration, Ability mastery, Background enhancements, Knacks, super-science gadgets or on other Traits.

### Transformation Points

| Trait                                   | Cost per dot |
|---|--------------|
| 2 Attribute dots (max. 5 in Trait)      | 1            |
| 5 Ability dots (max. 5 in Trait)        | 1            |
| Ability mastery (max. 3 Abilities)      | 1            |
| 4 Background dots (max. 5 in Trait)     | 1            |
| Background enhancement                  | 2            |
| 2 Willpower dots (max. 10 in Trait)     | 1            |
| Inspiration dot (max. 5 at this time)   | 1            |
| 3 Inspiration points to pool (no limit) | 1            |
| Knack, heroic                           | 2            |
| Knack, psychic or dynamic (level one)   | 1            |
| Knack, psychic or dynamic (level two)   | 2            |
| Knack, psychic or dynamic (level three) | 3            |
| Super-science invention                 | special      |

A character must already have 5 points in an Ability to purchase Ability mastery.

A character must already have 5 points in a Background to buy a Background enhancement.

Permanent Inspiration cannot be raised higher than 5 in character creation. Points added to the Inspiration pool are temporary, not permanent, but may increase the pool's total capacity beyond 10.

Only daredevils may purchase heroic Knacks. Only mesmerists may buy psychic Knacks. Only stalwarts may take dynamic Knacks. Psychic and dynamic Knacks are not hierarchical; you do not have to buy a level one Knack before you can buy a level two or level three Knack.

Super-science inventions are not purchased with transformation points. See Chapter Five: Super-Science, p. 176.

### Phase Three: Last Details

With purchases out of the way, you can now figure out point totals, as well as flesh out your character's history and personality.

#### •Step One: Final Touches

Calculate final dice pools, Initiative, movement and soak.

#### •Step Two: Spark of Life

Decide how your character came to be who she is.



## Phase One: Genesis

Your initial character idea can be just a couple sentences. You only need a hook on which to hang further details as you go.

Once you have the general concept — a dauntless crusader for justice, say — you should think a little about the person behind that idea. Consider your character not as a ready-made adventurer or hero, but as someone who has the seeds of greatness within her. You will add exceptional abilities to your character in later phases of the process. Worry about making a *person* first, and let the hero grow naturally from that.

## Step One: Concept

The first part is simple: In a few words or sentences, what sort of character do you want to play? What does she do? What is she like? What sort of people does she spend time with?

The concept could center around a skill (“I’m the world’s greatest doctor!”). It could come from the character’s back story (“She was raised by wolves until the age of six”). Or you might focus on a personality trait (“She’s obsessed with fathoming the criminal mind”). If you’re more visual than verbal, you might develop a mental picture and go from there (“He’s tall and impeccably dressed, but gaunt, with disturbingly long teeth and fingernails”).

After that, you can work out in all directions — personality (Why did he *want* to become the world’s greatest doctor?), history (Where did the gaunt gent get the money for that suit if he apparently can’t afford decent meals?), skills (What has she studied in order to understand criminals?), appearance (How does Little Miss Feral dress?) and so forth.

You do not need to flesh out the character’s life history nor choose her favorite movie. Keep your concept in mind throughout, though. If a skill or Background fits, take it. If there’s a clash (“Why is the wolf-girl an excellent navigator?”) stick to the concept. Trying to make a character who’s good at everything and has no flaws is counterproductive: Not only will you fail, you’ll produce a boring adventurer.

### Origin

Your character’s origin describes her in a word or a short phrase, an intentionally vague shorthand that gives you an idea of where she came from. What sort of life did the character lead before becoming an adventurer? Was it dominated by mundane chores, leaving her no time to look to the horizon? Did she live on the edge, spending each day as if it might be her last?

Your character’s past outlines who she knows, the resources she has at her disposal, her influence over others and the like. To reflect this, your character gets one point in an appropriate Background when you select an

origin. See “Origin,” page 128, for suggested character origins and their related Backgrounds.

**Example:** *William, the Storyteller, plans a series centered on New York City and its environs. Mike intends to run a mesmerist scientist, Jim a swashbuckling martial artist, and Brett a devil-may-care dilettante and pilot. Ellen decides to play a stalwart fist-to-the-jaw sort and chooses Low Class to reflect her character’s childhood in the city’s dirty underbelly. This origin also gives her character — who she names Rachel “Lady Lead” Buongiorno — one point in the Contacts Background.*

### Nature

An adventurer’s innermost being at once drives her and binds her. A character’s Nature is a key aspect of her personality and is split into a Virtue and a Vice (see p. 129 for a complete listing). Pick two components of your character’s Nature that are generally compatible with the way you intend to roleplay her. You should pay careful attention to the way by which a Virtue replenishes the character’s temporary Willpower and a Vice forces your character to expend temporary Willpower.

**Example:** *Ellen initially thinks that Bravo might make a good Virtue but decides that she’d prefer to have Lady Lead leap into dangerous situations and goes with Hot Shot instead. As for a Vice, Follower jumps out at Ellen; Rachel is a talented fighter, but she isn’t going to be out front shouting orders.*

### Allegiance

Allegiance gives an idea of where your character’s broad loyalties lie — whether to a nation, a cultural group or a private gentleman’s club. Many heroes are part of local or national groups; some are political, while others exist just to provide camaraderie for like-minded individuals. An allegiance gives your character a free dot in the Backing Background for that group. You don’t have to choose an allegiance; just note “Independent” on your character sheet — this means your character doesn’t get that free Background point, though. A sample list of allegiances starts on page 131.

**Example:** *The players in William’s series want their characters to see the world and explore uncharted regions. The Æon Society stands out as a good patron for this sort of thing. Along with the rest of the team, Ellen has Rachel be a member of one of the first local chapters of the Æon Society, which gives her Backing (Æon) 1.*

## Step Two: Choosing Attributes

Every character in **Adventure** has nine core Traits known as Attributes (described in detail starting on p. 134), which help define the character’s basic makeup and capabilities. Almost every action a character takes is based on at least one Attribute.

Attributes are ranked from one to five, with two being roughly human average (certain Inspired charac-



ters can exceed these limits with Knacks and super-science, but that's covered later). You note this rank on your character sheet by filling in the appropriate number of dots. Characters start with one dot in each of the nine Attributes and can improve them during character creation by spending Attribute points in a one-for-one exchange.

Attributes are divided into three categories: Physical, Mental and Social. When generating your character, decide which of these is most important (the primary group), which is second most (the secondary group) and which is least important (the tertiary group). You then add Attribute points into the various categories as follows: add six points to the primary group, four points to the secondary group and three points to the tertiary group. Allocate the points as you see fit within each. With six points for Mental Attributes, you could put three points into Intelligence, two into Wits and one into Perception; alternately, you could put two points into each Mental Attribute. Also select a quality for any of your character's Attributes at four dots or higher (see p. 134).

Match Attribute point expenditures to your character idea. The frail scientist isn't likely to have Stamina 5. If you assign him such a Trait, rethink the character's basic concept to fit that Attribute or consider spending the points somewhere else. When you're done, you may feel that an Attribute or two is lower than you would like. That's okay; you'll have a chance to change this with bonus points or during Phase Two, below.

**Example:** *Ellen sees Rachel Buongiorno as a strong woman who grew up in a tough part of town, the only girl in a house full of brothers and uncles. She decides Rachel's mother died when she was young and her father raised the family as best he could. Rachel didn't have much time for schoolwork as a girl, so Rachel's Mental Attributes are tertiary. Since Ellen wants Rachel to become Lady Lead during Phase Two, she decides that constant brawling with her younger brothers followed by training as an amateur boxer makes her Physical Attributes the primary group. That leaves Social Attributes secondary, which makes some sense; Rachel had to develop a forceful personality in her household.*

*Ellen splits up points as follows: As a boxer, Rachel's Strength, Dexterity and Stamina are all equally important (Strength for punches, Dexterity for dodges and Stamina for taking hits), splitting the primary group's six points by three, two for each Physical Attribute. Rachel now has three dots in each of her Physical Attributes (since all Attributes already start at one dot). Ellen splits four points among Rachel's Appearance, Manipulation and Charisma — two into Charisma (she wants Lady Lead to be a likeable heroine) and one each into Appearance and Manipulation. Last come the Mental Attributes. Ellen thinks Rachel's Wits should be higher than two dots, but doesn't want her Perception or Intelligence below average to pay that cost. She puts a point*

*into each Mental Attribute and makes a note to raise Lady Lead's Wits later on.*

## Step Three: Choosing Abilities

Abilities are your character's learned skills (see the full list starting on p. 138). Though based on the character's Attributes, they represent life experience rather than innate talent. Abilities are rated from one to five dots, but they aren't split into categories in character creation, and your character does not get a free point in each. Abilities start at a rating of 0; you get 23 points to spend however you wish among them, in a one-for-one ratio. The only remaining caveat is that a character cannot have any Ability above three dots during this stage of character generation.

Abilities should reflect the character's interests and history, as well as the areas in which you want the character to excel. It is neither desirable nor possible for a starting character to excel in every Ability. Instead, decide what your character has learned and is good at. If you end up with a few extra points, put them in something you think would be fun or useful in play. If you're short a few points, you can increase the character's Abilities with bonus points or during Phase Two.

**Example:** *Ellen sees that her character should have good scores in Brawl and Athletics; Endurance and Resistance also seem important. Some Medicine would be handy, considering Rachel's familiarity with her own injuries and patching up her brothers after their fights and mishaps. Due to life in a tough environment, Intimidation would be useful. Ellen puts three dots in Brawl and two in each of the other "main" Abilities she picked out.*

*Ellen has spent 13 of her character's 23 points. A few other Abilities seem appropriate, but don't jump out as much: Awareness, Drive, Etiquette, Might and Savvy. They work well with Ellen's concept, but she's not worried if she can't afford them all. She puts one point into each of this second group of Abilities. That means 18 points have been spent, with five Ability points left.*

*A point in Linguistics would allow Rachel to speak the Italian of her parents' homeland, which seems appropriate. This leaves four points. Ellen would like to give Rachel Brawl 4, but cannot do so at this stage, so she raises Rachel's Athletics and Endurance to three dots each and adds another point each to her character's Awareness and Drive.*

## Dice Pools

As mentioned in Chapter One: Rules, you add each Ability to its corresponding matched Attribute to determine dice pools. The character sheet (p. 272) has a box next to every Ability where you can write this total for quick reference during action sequences. When an Attribute and/or Ability goes up with experience points (see "Character Development," p. 124), refigure the appropriate dice pool.



## Step Four: Backgrounds

Backgrounds (listed starting on p. 144) represent your character's relationship to the rest of the **Adventure** world. They don't refer to your character's innate or learned gifts; instead, they represent her ties to the world around her. These ties can include her friends and contacts, property and material assets and other things. You have six Background points to spend. As with the other facets of character generation, you can increase Backgrounds with bonus points in Step Five or with transformation points during Phase Two.

**Example:** *Rachel's family remains very important to her, even though she has left home and lives in a boarding house in Brooklyn. She also gets good advice from her trainer, Vinny "the Broom" Bromowski. More generally, she knows a couple of fighters and trainers on the boxing circuit who hear scuttlebutt a few hours ahead of the papers. Rachel probably has a reputation that is not altogether positive, given the mores of the day.*

Ellen puts one point into **Resources** to represent Rachel's modest means. She figures her brothers, father and uncles around the city are worth three points of **Allies**. Vinny the Broom is a one-point **Mentor**. Rachel started with one point in **Contacts** thanks to her origin, above; Ellen figures the boys on the circuit are worth another point in that Background. She also got a free **Backing** dot from her allegiance before to represent her standing in the **Æon Society**, which she notes now.

Ellen cannot afford a point of **Reputation** right now and decides to spend bonus points to pick it up later. Ellen should assign names and descriptions to two major **Contacts** as the Background requires, but she would rather talk to the **Storyteller** and see if he has any appropriate characters to fit those spaces.

## Step Five: Finishing Touches

Just a few short pieces remain to complete the "ordinary" version of your character: her strength of will, Inspiration, reaction speed, movement and bonus points.

### Willpower

Willpower represents your character's strength of purpose and her ability to overcome her own greatest limitations. The circles on your character sheet represent your character's permanent Willpower. This rating is your *dice pool*, the number of dice used when you roll the character's Willpower. The squares underneath the permanent Willpower represent the character's temporary, or current, Willpower. These squares are filled in as the points are earned (by adhering to the character's **Virtue**) and erased as they are spent. See "Willpower," page 151, for a detailed explanation of this important Trait.

Permanent and temporary Willpower are each rated on a scale of 1 to 10, although temporary Willpower can never exceed the permanent score. Your character begins with Willpower 3; you can raise this number using bonus points to a maximum of 10 (see below).

### Inspiration

Inspiration is the core Trait that separates adventurers from ordinary folks. It's not available to the un-Inspired, so your character has Inspiration 0 at this stage. See below for further details on Inspiration.

### Initiative

Initiative represents how quickly the character reacts to rapidly changing events. A character's starting Initiative score is the sum of her **Dexterity** and **Wits** Attributes. You can also use bonus points, transformation points or experience points to increase Initiative independently of the total figured from your character's **Dexterity** and **Wits**.

### Movement

The character's movement scores represent the number of meters she can move in a single action. Your character may walk, run or sprint. If walking, she moves at (**Dexterity** + 2) meters in one turn. If running, she moves (**Dexterity** + 12) meters per turn. If sprinting, she moves  $[(\text{Dexterity} \times 3) + 20]$  meters per turn. Some Traits may increase this total, but you cannot spend bonus points to do so. See page 187 for more on movement.

**Example:** *Ellen works out Lady Lead's final Traits. Rachel has Willpower 3; Inspiration 0; Initiative 5 (**Dexterity** 3 + **Wits** 2); and movement of 5 m walk, 15 m run and 29 m sprint.*

### Bonus Points

You can further customize your character at the end of Phase One with bonus points. They can improve your character's Attributes, Abilities, Backgrounds, Initiative or Willpower. You cannot raise an Ability above three dots at this stage (you'll have to wait for Phase Two for that). Unlike the points from previous steps, bonus points do not spend in a one-for-one ratio. See the **Character Creation Table**, page 116, for bonus point costs to raise various Traits.

You get 15 bonus points to spend.

**Example:** *Raising Rachel's Wits to three dots (as Ellen wanted earlier) takes five points and boosts her Initiative by one. Another five points and Rachel's Strength goes up by one also. Ellen wants to raise Rachel's Brawl score, but she must wait for the next step in character creation. With five bonus points left, Ellen spends four points to give Rachel Willpower 5. The last point buys a dot in the Reputation Background. Ellen is now done with Phase One!*

## Phase Two: Transformation

Now you know who your character used to be and what her mundane life was like. In Phase Two you transform her from ordinary person into heroic adventurer!



## Step One: Inspiration

A character's Inspiration is the source of her heroic being. The moment of Inspiration is crucial to the character — arguably, it's the most important thing that will ever happen to her. It typically happens as a result of stress, either positive or negative. Winning an important government grant could be a scientific character's moment of Inspiration; narrowly surviving drowning in icy rapids might be a more suitable Inspiration for an explorer. Inspiration can also flow from the course of a character's life and commitments, rather than a single event.

Your character gets Inspiration 1 now; this score can be increased with transformation points. Like Willpower, permanent Inspiration ranges from 1 to 10 points and is noted by filling in the appropriate number of circles on the character sheet. The squares underneath the permanent Inspiration represent the character's temporary, or current, pool of Inspiration points. These squares are filled in as the points are earned (by performing appropriately heroic and, well, inspired acts) and erased as they are spent.

The pool of temporary points starts equal to your character's permanent score. The temporary amount can also exceed your character's permanent Inspiration score in the course of the game. This doesn't happen too often, but it is possible. See page 152 for more details about this essential Trait.

## Inspired Character Types

There are three methods of Inspiration — and accordingly, three kinds of characters in **Adventure**. Those who experience heroic Inspiration are known as "daredevils"; characters who go through psychic Inspiration are called "mesmerists"; and those who benefit from dynamic Inspiration are named "stalwarts."

Make no mistake, a stalwart can certainly be heroic or a mesmerist may well be dynamic, in the general sense of the words. In **Adventure**, each term reflects the unique manner in which the character is Inspired. The respective labels are primarily for convenience. A "daredevil" does not have to go skydiving and bullfighting on the weekends. A "mesmerist" does not necessarily dress in a cloak and turban and use hypnosis to entrance her foes. And a "stalwart" isn't necessarily a stocky fireplug of justice.

- **Heroic Inspiration:** This transformation draws upon the individual's inner courage and willpower. Heroic Inspiration does not bestow supernatural abilities or powers. Instead, the character's raw courage and wit gives her the ability to excel at "ordinary" tasks. A daredevil can buy heroic Knacks and create Advanced super-science inventions.

- **Psychic Inspiration:** This transformation taps into the character's mental fortitude. Psychic Inspiration provides access to fantastic mental abilities, including the

power to sway men's minds or move remote objects with a thought. A mesmerist can choose from psychic Knacks and can create Advanced and Innovative super-science inventions.

- **Dynamic Inspiration:** This transformation provides the adventurer with incredible physiological benefit. Dynamic Inspiration alters the character's body and endows her with amazing physical abilities. A stalwart can purchase dynamic Knacks and can create Advanced and Innovative super-science inventions.

## The Instance of Inspiration

For many characters, Inspiration occurs in a single defining moment or as part of a life-changing event. Something happens that awakens the latent Z-wave energy within them and grants them abilities beyond those of ordinary men and women. Such characters will often begin to describe their Inspirations with the phrase "...and then, *all of a sudden...*"

Not all characters undergo Inspiration in a single defining moment. One might decide after a mugging that he must train himself rigorously so it never happens again. He still experiences the Inspiration but a little at a time. A devoted scholar might throw herself into her studies, only to realize after months or even years of research that she has bypassed ordinary human potential. Or, in a classic pulp schtick, the character's Inspiration might be the result of years of semi-mystical training in a remote monastery or hidden school. These characters might lack the shock and giddiness of those who experience sudden Inspiration, but that won't make roleplaying them any less enjoyable.

The event that causes the character's Inspiration shapes the type of transformation that occurs. Stalwarts most commonly transform in the face of a physical challenge. Mesmerists' Inspirations often come from mental challenges or emotional shocks. Daredevils, in many ways the generalists of **Adventure**, attain Inspiration through some manner of tremendous heroism.

Here is a list of possible Inspirations and the types of adventurers most appropriate to result from them. Use these choices as a springboard for your own ideas:

- **Dawning Awareness:** In studying esoteric philosophies or branches of science, the character unlocks the true potential of her mind. This is likely to take a lot of study, although certain chemicals might aid the character in throwing off the chains of the conscious mind. This provokes psychic Inspiration, and the philosophy or science the character studies is sure to affect the kind of Knacks at which she excels.

- **Exposure to Z-waves:** This Inspirational event is wide open, as telluric energy permeates most of the world in the Adventure Era. Perhaps the character was there at Hammersmith's original presentation. Maybe he has an associate (or mentor?) who created a Z-wave device, and exposure to it unleashed the character's own latent abilities.



ties. Or he might be an explorer who happened upon a natural phenomenon that stored telluric energy (this could be anything from ancient ruins made from just the right material to the venom of a particular Amazonian spider). Exposure to Z-waves can trigger any of the three character types.

- **Fantastic Success:** This rare transformation occurs when the character finally accomplishes a deed in which she has invested a lot of work and emotion. She might be the first in her family to receive a college diploma; perhaps she climbs a high mountain; maybe she is elected to city council. Most often, these events generate heroic or psychic Inspiration.

- **Life-Threatening Accident:** The accident the character was in would have killed him, had his Inspiration not saved him at just that moment! This accident could be anything — a train sideswiped his motorcar; he fell from a great height; he was in a house fire. The character's friend or family member might suffer an accident instead, in which case he is transformed by the need to rescue his loved one. This typically produces dynamic Inspiration, transforming the character to survive the trauma in question. However, using ingenuity and courage to escape might trigger heroic Inspiration.

- **Personal Stupidity:** Similar to the accident and violence options, with this event, the character undoubtedly brought her problems onto herself. Perhaps it seemed like a good idea to go kayaking in a thunderstorm; maybe she chose to rob the bank next door to the police station at lunchtime; perhaps she decided to go spelunking her way into an uncharted cave alone. Regardless of the reason, only Inspiration saved her from her predicament. This is a common cause of heroic Inspiration (though plenty of daredevils keep that fact hidden).

- **Social Challenge:** The character faced down mortal embarrassment or the risk thereof or finally stood up for herself and threw off an oppressor or abuser. This kind of experience leans the character toward psychic Inspiration, as her mind and mental faculties become more highly attuned.

- **Training:** The character is the result of a long training period. Perhaps he spent his life pursuing physical or mental perfection in a distant monastery. Perhaps he traveled to learn from the finest teacher in the world. Perhaps he is the product of a secret government training program. Any type of Inspiration (heroic, psychic or dynamic) is justified with this origin.

- **Violence:** Directly or indirectly, the character suffered an attack. Perhaps he was caught in a battle in the Middle East or took a side in a running gunfight between police and gangsters or was a victim of domestic violence. Violence typically, though not always, induces dynamic Inspiration. One character might think his way out of a tough situation to become a mesmerist, while another uses sheer raw damn manliness to become a daredevil!

**Example:** *Ellen sees Lady Lead as a stalwart; she pictures the character actually having some of the physical properties of lead! "Exposure to Z-waves" would work well. She figures that Rachel's father's bookie says he knows a guy who could make her the strongest woman in the Five Boroughs. Rachel's not interested, but she goes to humor her dad. Dr. Daniel Hrozencik is a scientist of sorts who claims that he can put athletes through some alchemical vitamin regimen to increase their musculature. When he demonstrates the Philosopher's Grinder for Rachel to brew her vitamin supplements, something goes horribly wrong! The machine explodes, killing Hrozencik, exposing Rachel to its core — and transforming her into Lady Lead, whose flesh exhibits some of the properties of that metal. Ellen will work out the precise effects in Steps Two and Three, below.*

## Step Two: Define the Inspiration

The inspiring moment shapes the capabilities the character manifests. Her own deep personal drives and convictions determine how and when she can put her Inspiration to best use; this is handled by having Inspiration facets, Traits tied to the character's Inspiration. Each **Adventure** character has ratings in three Inspiration facets: Intuitive, Reflective and Destructive.

Although linked to the character's Inspiration Trait, these facets have their own unique function in the game. The Intuitive facet rewards immediate action; the Reflective facet rewards caution and forethought; the Destructive facet rewards the shattering of obstacles, be they physical, social or emotional. See page 152 for further details.

All Inspired characters have the three facets but do not necessarily have ratings in all three. Each facet is rated on a one to five scale and begins at zero. You allocate points to them once you've determined your character's total Inspiration Trait score (so a character with Inspiration 4 has four points to apply to any of the three facets). The highest facet rating should always be that which you feel is most suitable to the character. If you increase your character's Inspiration later by spending transformation points or experience points, remember to allocate a matching number of points to her Inspiration facets.

**Example:** *Ellen has one Inspiration point so far; she considers putting it into Destructive Inspiration. Yet, Rachel is dedicated to her family and city institutions and isn't driven by the need to destroy barriers, even those that may need it. Reflective Inspiration isn't any kind of option. Rachel is a woman of action; she moves first and considers the consequences later. Ellen puts Rachel's dot into Intuitive Inspiration. She'll use the same logic to add more facet points after she's raised Lady Lead's Inspiration score.*



## Step Three: Transformation Points

Now, you decide precisely what your character's Inspiration changed within her. This metamorphosis is handled by spending transformation points. A beginning character gets 13 transformation points; you can use these to improve nearly any aspect of the character, including Attributes, Abilities, Backgrounds, Initiative, Willpower, Inspiration, Knacks and super-science inventions!

Always remember that **Adventure** characters are not four-color superheroes by any stretch of the imagination. Admittedly, they have capabilities that no ordinary person has, and they can do some pretty fantastic things, but they are still fundamentally people. They succeed because of their grit, determination and ingenuity, not because of some list of super-powers.

Certain restrictions apply, depending on the character's Inspiration type. The Storyteller has final approval over all transformation point expenditures.

### Transformation Point Options:

- Increase normal Attributes to a maximum of 5. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for 2 Attribute points. This increase will change relevant dice pools and may impact Initiative, movement and soak ratings.

- Increase normal Abilities to a maximum of 5. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for 5 Ability points. This increase requires recalculating relevant dice pools.

- Purchase Ability mastery. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for 1 dot of Ability mastery, purchased once on no more than three separate Abilities. This mastery will change the relevant dice pool; the character must already have five dots in the Ability.

- Increase Backgrounds to a maximum of 5. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for 4 Background points.

- Purchase Background enhancement. **Cost:** 2 transformation points. The character must already have five dots in the Background.

- Increase Willpower Trait to a maximum of 10. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for 2 permanent Willpower. Each additional permanent Willpower also gives the character one temporary Willpower point.

- Increase Inspiration Trait to a maximum of 5. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for 1 permanent Inspiration. This Trait is rated on a 1 to 10 scale, but a character may not start with Inspiration higher than 5. Each additional permanent Inspiration also gives the character one temporary Inspiration point.

- Add temporary Inspiration points to pool. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for 3 temporary Inspiration. Each point purchased adds to the character's temporary pool and increases the pool's capacity by the same amount. By definition, this allows the character to have a total pool higher than her permanent Inspiration score. (The base Inspiration pool is 10, so two transformation points adds six temporary Inspiration to the character's start-

ing pool and increases the pool's total capacity to 16.) As with any other temporary Inspiration, these points are gone after they are spent during gameplay.

- Purchase heroic Knacks. **Cost:** 2 transformation points for each heroic Knack. This option is restricted to daredevils.

- Purchase psychic Knacks. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for a level one psychic Knack; 2 transformation points for a level two psychic Knack; 3 transformation points for a level three psychic Knack. You do not have to buy a lower-level Knack before buying one of higher level. This option is restricted to mesmerists.

- Purchase dynamic Knacks. **Cost:** 1 transformation point for a level one dynamic Knack; 2 transformation points for a level two dynamic Knack; 3 transformation points for a level three dynamic Knack. You do not have to buy a lower-level Knack before buying one of higher level. This option is restricted to stalwarts.

**Example:** Ellen wants Lady Lead to be exceptionally strong and resilient, so she spends one transformation point to give the stalwart Strength 5 and Stamina 4. She wants to raise Stamina to five points — Rachel is, after all, now partly made out of lead — but since one transformation point gives two Attribute points, Ellen must raise another Attribute also. Ellen decides Lady Lead is fairly likable and puts the other point into Charisma.

Ellen then spends one transformation point to get five points in Abilities. She raises Rachel's Brawl by two points, Athletics and Resistance each by one point, and gives one point to Rapport (having had no points in Rapport previously).

Ellen spent three transformation points on Abilities and Attributes; she has 10 left. She looks at Knacks next. Since Lady Lead has been changed into a somewhat metallic form, she doesn't require the same environment that ordinary people do to survive. Ellen buys the level one dynamic Knack Man for All Seasons (which she notes as "Woman for All Seasons"), the level two dynamic Knack Optimized Metabolism and the level three dynamic Knack Body of Bronze (to simulate Lady Lead's metallic physique). These cost six points in total, leaving her four. Ellen spends one to boost Rachel's Willpower by two; Lady Lead is strong-willed. The remaining three are spent to give her character Inspiration 4.

## Phase Three: Last Details

Once the numbers are crunched and the dots filled in, it's tempting to leave the remaining questions about a character's background and personality to chance or random decisions in-play. You may leave some questions about a character's life unanswered or deliberately add in new bits of history or personality in reaction to events during the game. But if you want to make sure your character's background is internally consistent and



matches a certain initial conception, now is a good time to answer a few questions about her.

## Step One: Final Touches

Finally, the last of the crunchy bits. You may need to recalculate the character's Inspiration facets, Initiative and movement based on how you spent transformation points. You should also calculate the character's bashing and lethal soak. Bashing soak is equal to the character's Stamina Trait, while lethal soak starts at zero. Each may be increased by appropriate Knacks and armor.

**Example:** *Allocating the Inspiration facets, Lady Lead has Initiative 3 and Destructive 1. Her final Initiative is 6 (Dexterity 3 + Wits 3), but since her Dexterity remains the same, her movement rates stay at 5 m walk, 15 m run and 25 m sprint. Her base bashing soak is equal to her Stamina 5, and she has no base lethal soak. The Body of Bronze Knack boosts her soak totals to a staggering [7/5].*

## Step Two: Spark of Life

The numbers are all laid out; dots fill your character sheet with abandon. It is time to figure out who your character really is. You need not answer all of these questions ahead of time. Still, you should at least use them to get an idea of what your character's responses will be to various roleplaying situations.

• **How old are you?** Characters in *Adventure* can be any age, though very few are likely to be younger than 15. Most are young adults, from early 20s to mid-30s. If your character is older than you are, think about how the added life experience is likely to shape her outlook; if she is younger than you are, try to think back to your own attitudes at that age.

• **What do you look like?** The character's Appearance Trait only begins to describe the character; other players and the Storyteller won't be satisfied with "Oh, she's very attractive; she has Appearance 4" and nothing more. Find a book, magazine or Website with pictures of 1920s film stars and celebrities to get a feel for the look of the age; you could even photocopy an image that seems appropriate to your character.

• **Was your life adventurous before your Inspiration?** It's certainly not required that it was, but many Inspired characters do lead unusual daily lives.

• **Was your transformation instant or slow?** For most characters, Inspiration happens all at once, but there are circumstances that lead to a slow Inspiration.

• **What are your quirks?** A funny voice, a strange accent, a twitch or other behavior quirk may help you get grounded into your character, and it may help the other players and the Storyteller differentiate when you are making a comment out of character or in character. Don't overdo it! The last thing the world needs is another terrible Scottish accent.

• **Are you close to any family members?** Family members make great story hooks and they fill in slots in

your character's Backgrounds as contacts, allies, mentors or followers. Giving your character an emotional relationship with family members helps to ground you in the character that much better. Some characters might be loners, alienated from family or having no living family; that in itself is a character hook, as you should ask why the character is in such straits.

• **What do you do for a living?** If your character is very young, she probably doesn't have a job, but remember that people took adult jobs far earlier in the 1920s than they do in the early 21st century — in fact, the economic crash of the 1930s brought the average working age up to its current level. School was important, but most kids didn't spend as long in school as they do in the modern day.

So, your character probably has a job. What does she do? Even if she's independently wealthy (requiring a high Resources Background and a plausible explanation in her history), your character must still expend some effort to maintain that status. At the very least, she has to make an appearance at the office/shareholders' meeting/crime den/what-have-you. A character who works for a living has correspondingly greater demands upon her time and freedom.

• **How do you react to new people?** Is your character naturally sullen and suspicious when introduced to new Storyteller and players' characters? Or is she a little too trusting? Each has its own entertainment value; make sure the choice is true to the character you've created.

• **Why do you adventure?** What drives your character? She received Inspiration at one point not long ago; what was she doing that brought it about? Now that she has it, why doesn't she just retire to a life of relative safety? She is out risking her life and exploring the world in this series; what put her there? This is your best chance to drop a plot hook in your Storyteller's lap: Perhaps your character adventures because her true love spurned her; perhaps she has debts and needs to rack up some money, fast; perhaps she simply has an unquenchable curiosity about the unknown. Your Storyteller will use this motivation to formulate plots and subplots for your character, so make sure to share your thoughts.

## Prologue

Most Storytellers will run your character through a prologue story before introducing her to the ongoing series. A prologue usually begins with your character as an ordinary person and ends with her Inspiration and transformation. A good prologue can be great fodder for you as a player; your character's allies or contacts come alive, and the Storyteller's attention is focused on you and you alone.

While the Storyteller will use the background that you and he worked out, he is likely to take the story beyond what you've already discussed and bring your character from an ordinary person to an intrepid righter of wrongs.



Remember that the Storyteller is in charge of your prologue, and he may dictate that your character takes certain actions to better fit his overall plan for the story. Most of the time, though, the important decisions remain in your hands.

## Fine Tuning

The prologue lets you test your character, making sure she can do the things you want her to. It's not unusual to discover that an Ability functions differently than you thought or that a higher (or lower!) Trait makes more sense for your character. After the prologue, you may modify your character (with the Storyteller's supervision), adjusting her to better fit your concept and the series. You don't get any more points to spend, but you may shift the existing ones around as appropriate. Once you begin the regular series, any further modifications must be made with experience points.

## Character Development

During a story, your character learns many things about herself, her abilities and her needs for improvement. Success and failure combine to teach you about your character's limitations and potential. Your character will make mistakes, gain insight, practice and (hopefully) not repeat past errors. All of these things are measured in **Adventure** through experience points.

## Experience

The Storyteller has must quantify each character's experiences. While the knowledge *you* gain concerning plotlines, supporting characters and your team cannot be measured, *your character's* experience can. Experience points are an artificial measure of success or accomplishment that translates into enhanced power, influence and capability.

## Awarding Experience Points

The Storyteller should award experience points at the end of every story in a series (see p. 110 for the game's time increments). A story may transpire over multiple game sessions. If a given story arc may last more than three episodes, the Storyteller should give experience points about halfway through. (Withholding experience points for too long can frustrate players.) All characters typically get the same number, although outstanding accomplishments or roleplaying can earn an individual bonus. The amount the Storyteller gives depends on a number of factors, as covered below. Certain rewards needn't be given out all the time. Doling a few out here and there won't unbalance the series, and getting players in the habit of doing "cool stuff" for a game makes the whole experience more enjoyable.

The categories below describe areas in which characters can win experience. Each category is worth one experience point. No character should ever fulfill every

single category at one time, although multiple characters may qualify for the same award.

- **Automatic:** Each character receives one point at the end of a story.

- **Discovery:** The character understands something new and significant about herself, her fellow adventurers or the universe.

- **Exceptional Roleplay:** The player roleplayed her character particularly well. This behavior should be appropriate to the character; points should not be awarded for outlandish, out-of-character antics.

- **Heroism:** The character risked life and limb to save the day. Only the most dramatic situations qualify for this award — a typical cliffhanger or simple stupidity does not count.

- **Wisdom:** The character discovered a way out of a trap or learned the truth behind a mystery. The group often deduces solutions together, in which case, everyone should be awarded. If one character pieces everything together by herself, only she gets the award.

- **Cohesion:** The characters worked exceptionally well together, defeating their opponents or strategically investigating all avenues of information.

- **Mentoring:** A player helps involve new or shy players in the game events, even at the risk of having her character miss out on exciting in-game events.

- **Creativity:** This award is reserved for players who add to the story's enjoyment without detracting from the game. This includes, but is not limited to, creating well-developed backgrounds, in-character journals, short stories and/or introducing new story elements. This bonus is highly discretionary and should be awarded infrequently.

- **Ambiance:** A player who adds significantly to the overall mood might win this one. Possibilities include: creating "theme music" mix tapes or CDs for each session; drawing character sketches of team members and notable Storyteller characters; building virtual reality walkthroughs (using the 3D graphics engine of choice) of important locales in the game; cleaning up before and after sessions and providing drinks and snacks; or chauffeuring other players to and from the game. As with creativity, this bonus is highly discretionary.

## Roleplaying Development

So the Storyteller hands out experience points. When do you get to spend them on your character? It's arguable that a character shouldn't improve an important skill in the middle of an episode. Some players may feel a character should be able to improve a Trait at any time, that not every skill must wait for the character to catch her breath. In the end, the Storyteller should do what works for the group. If he's uncomfortable with characters improving in mid-episode, he should say so and be consistent about it. If he doesn't mind, he should let players know that, too. If he wants to take some middle ground (characters can improve Abilities based on Physi-



cal Attributes during episodes, but everything else has to wait until a decent downtime occurs), that's fine too.

The actual timing of a Trait's increase is less important than that it make sense within the context of the story. There's no reason why Professor Dixon should suddenly boost his Firearms Ability if he hasn't even picked up a pistol in the past five games. Skill doesn't develop spontaneously. The dots on your character sheet are easy to fill in, but improving such capabilities in real life takes time, practice and application. **Adventure** characters, like real people, can improve only those Traits they exercise.

There are three key ways to justify increasing your character's capabilities: application, research and training. You can spend experience points on a particular Trait only if your character has used that skill, performed thorough research or received additional training. Whatever the method, it's important to roleplay the development. Whether that means seeking out a mentor for formalized training or swapping tips of the trade with others, development must be part of the story. Taking an entire episode to roll dice and increase your character's Brawl rating isn't the point. The development can plumb new depths in your character's identity and in the story.

The Storyteller and the player should agree upon the circumstance and time necessary to improve a Trait. Skill improvement need not be the *focus* of the story, but it should derive logically from the plot.

## Application

Using a Trait repeatedly is the primary way to exercise it. Abilities that your character uses regularly are perfect to spend experience on. Such "training in the field" is suitable for virtually all Traits. This applies even if your character fails in a task. Sometimes, we learn more from our mistakes than from our successes.

## Research

Research is useful for improving knowledge-related Traits. You can increase such Traits at low levels through in-depth study. At higher ratings, your character must combine research with real-world application. Finding research material can take some effort, depending on where your character is. In civilized lands, she can visit a library, museum or laboratory. In the hinterlands, your character may need to study under a local shaman or perform field research. New material appropriate to a Trait must be studied each time you wish to increase that Trait.

## Training

Your character can seek training if he isn't exposed to situations in which his Abilities improve naturally. Training focuses on improving a certain Trait through rigorous repetition in a controlled environment. Any Trait can be improved this way, although some skills develop better through real-world application. Your character can seek training from numerous sources. Gyms and dojos promote physical fitness, schools and private individuals offer educational programs. Organizations such as the *Æon Society* also offer some level of training. Attending such places typically costs money and time, though. The Storyteller should attach an appropriate price tag and training time, in addition to the experience-point cost.

## Increasing Attributes

Each Attribute group demands a different focus for improvement. Physical Attributes can be improved through rigorous training or exercise. Combat experience, manual labor or athletic pursuits can all improve your character's physical prowess. Mental Attributes develop mostly through discipline and constant exposure to new material. A stagnant mind never improves, while an active one can overcome any limitation. The major component of improving Social Attributes is human interaction. Practice and some training with others can help mold social skills.

## Increasing Abilities

**Adventure** characters possess a wide range of Abilities, which improve readily with the proper focus. Any Ability can be increased given appropriate training. While such improvement is rapid at low levels, the cost increases dramatically as your character's experience grows. Even among adventurers, only the most dedicated individuals can master their fields.

### Experience Costs

Once experience is doled out, players can spend it in any of the following areas. Costs vary depending on the Trait involved. Also, increasing Traits or buying new ones must be roleplayed before spending any points (the roleplaying is what's important, after all).

| Trait Increase | Cost               |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Attribute      | current rating x 4 |
| Ability        | current rating x 2 |
| Willpower      | current rating     |
| Inspiration    | current rating x 6 |
| Background     | current rating x 2 |
| Initiative     | current rating     |

| New Trait                               | Cost |
|---|------|
| Ability                                 | 3    |
| Specialty (max. 3 per Ability)          | 1    |
| Ability mastery (max. 3 total)          | 12   |
| Background                              | 2    |
| Background enhancement                  | 12   |
| Knack, heroic                           | 10   |
| Knack, psychic or dynamic (level one)   | 8    |
| Knack, psychic or dynamic (level two)   | 12   |
| Knack, psychic or dynamic (level three) | 16   |



An Ability in which your character has a specialty increases just like any other. When the specialized Ability raises to the next dot, your character's specialty automatically goes up as well, remaining one dot higher than the Ability itself. This increase works the same for all of the specialties that your character has in that Ability.

Say your character currently has two dots in Firearms and you previously bought the Targeting specialty (giving your character an extra die when aiming). Raising the Firearms Ability to three dots costs four experience points, and you still keep the extra die for Targeting (giving your character a rating of Firearms 4 when aiming).

## Increasing Backgrounds

Backgrounds are improved only through actual roleplay. Your character cannot study new contacts, nor can she practice increasing her number of close allies or her mentor's power and influence. Backgrounds develop strictly over the course of a story. The Storyteller can introduce a potential contact, but he might never call back if your character screws up the meeting. Likewise, your character may actively seek to gain more influence by manipulating politicians and local authorities. To retain the effort as an intrinsic part of your character, you must then spend the appropriate experience.

New Backgrounds develop in much the same way. You or the Storyteller introduces them, and they are made permanent after roleplay by spending experience points. This is not to say that your character can *only* have friends, resources or equipment if she buys them as Backgrounds! If she stumbles across a crate full of gold or lucks onto Z-beam rifle, you needn't spend experience for her to keep it.

Backgrounds represent relationships that you feel create an especially important dynamic for your character. Friends, money and connections that aren't purchased as Backgrounds still exist, but they don't have the same strong ties to your character as those bought as Backgrounds do. Spend experience only on the Backgrounds that you want to be a central part of the story, a sort of "supporting cast" of your very own. Backgrounds give your character special benefits and shouldn't be treated frivolously (by either player or Storyteller).

## Increasing Knacks

The means for increasing an adventurer's unique powers are as individual as the character herself. Æon and a few other groups have rudimentary training facilities, but they know little about the workings of telluric energy and how it influences the Inspired. It's seldom immediately clear how effective a given training regimen is. Ultimately, most Inspired must train themselves through trial and (sometimes dangerous) error. Developing a new Knack is at least as tricky as training in an existing one. Often, an adventurer discovers a new Knack

by accident, the stress of a situation unlocking some heretofore unrealized power.

## Losing Traits

Attributes, Abilities and Knacks are typically reduced only due to extreme injury, loss of a limb or a similar condition. If your character suffers an injury sufficient to impair her, the Storyteller must decide what impact the accident has on her Traits.

Backgrounds can lower in rating over time, whether due to your character's own actions or thanks to plot circumstances. A contact, mentor or an ally may meet a tragic end, break off the relationship with your character due to some philosophical or political disagreement or simply get fed up with how your character has treated him. Your character could lose influence or backing due to a coup or by getting fired for spending too much time chasing after so-called jaguar-men in South America. She could lose resources thanks to bad investments, theft or by being too free with her money. A treasured gadget could be damaged or lost in battle, stolen by a dastardly rival, or even be replaced by something better.

Backgrounds should be reduced only if the player abuses them (having her character assault allies, squander resources) or if the reduction furthers the plot. If it's the former, it's fair to say your character shouldn't have such Backgrounds; the Storyteller may have you allocate those points elsewhere. In the latter case, the Storyteller should restore or replace the Background at an appropriate point in the story. Any changes to a character's Backgrounds should be justified through the character's own actions or contribute productively and significantly to the story. Followers don't exist for the Storyteller to snuff; they're just as much a part of the character as her Attributes and Abilities, and they should be given the same consideration.

## Personality Development

Your character's personality can change radically over time. Innocent youths can become hardened veterans, while cynics can learn to believe in truly good causes. These changes cannot be mapped on a character sheet. They develop through roleplaying and interaction with other characters. Certain Traits, however, define your character's personality. Nature's Virtue and Vice describe true personality, allegiance reflects loyalties, Willpower rates strength of will and Inspiration assesses the intangible spirit within all living things.

## Changing Nature

Nature defines a personality's overriding focus. The forces that shape a child into an adult mold the basic fabric of her personality. These influences (parents, siblings, friends, enemies) cannot be denied. For the purposes of **Adventure**, your character's Virtue and Vice should rarely shift. One or both might change only after long-term influ-





ence from outside sources, in-depth “soul searching” or after a particularly traumatic event. Discuss desired changes to Nature with the Storyteller so the adjustment may be tied into the game. Whatever the specific circumstance, the change should be a dramatic story element.

### Changing Allegiance

Allegiance can be altered as the story warrants (an independent adventurer being recruited by the Crown, an Aeon member betraying the group to the Ubiquitous Dragon, etc.). Switching allegiance can have grave consequences in the story — and betraying an influential power is almost certain to make the character many enemies.

### Increasing Willpower

Willpower is a quantified Trait that may be raised with experience points. However, this Trait should not increase without some logical reason. For example, a traumatic event may harden your character’s heart, strength-

ening her resolve. Focus and meditation could lead to an improved understanding of her core being. In short, events during the story have a direct effect on Willpower, much as they do any other Trait. The main difference between Willpower and other Traits is that Willpower cannot be researched or taught. The Storyteller should never casually approve increases in Willpower.

### Increasing Inspiration

More than any other Trait, Inspiration is a measure of a character’s potential for power. Accordingly, Inspiration can be increased only by exploring the potential implied in one’s Inspiration facets and by practicing one’s Knacks. Characters who routinely push their limits — playing key roles in cliffhangers, creating imaginative new uses for their Knacks and the like — are eligible for an increase in Inspiration. As always, the Storyteller has final say as to whether spending experience points in this area has been justified in the game.



## CHAPTER TRAITS THREE

Traits register your character's capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. This framework gives you the general parameters of what your character can accomplish, but your imagination and roleplaying shape what he actually does. Traits in **Adventure** are designed to be broad; this game is about characters, not statistics. The previous chapter outlined the character creation and development process; this chapter contains many of the Traits you may choose from to design your character. Knacks and super-science are detailed in Chapters Four and Five.

### Origin

To help roleplay who your character is now, you should know where he came from. What circumstances molded him into what he is now? Someone who was raised to a life of great wealth and luxury might become a jaded sybarite. On the other hand, he might (like the Buddha) decide from personal experience that such amenities are worthless. Someone born poor might stay poor or might be driven to become a ruthless business entrepreneur.

Each sample origin contains a brief description and lists a few specific examples that fit the particular origin. When you choose your character's origin, you also get one point in a single related Background; appropriate choices are listed at the end of each description. In addition to the origins here, feel free to generate your own and determine its corresponding Background, with the Storyteller's approval.

#### Aboriginal

Instead of being raised in a "developed" nation such as those of Europe or the United States, you had the traditional upbringing of a low-tech society.

**Examples:** Australian Aborigine, Bedouin, Inuit, Pygmy

**Background Options:** Cipher or Menagerie

#### Activist

You're a proponent of new, modern politics.

**Examples:** Anarchist, Suffragette, Communist, Fascist

**Background Options:** Influence or Reputation

#### Academic

You're a scholar from a long line of scholars — education and knowledge have always been important to you.

**Examples:** Scientist, Teacher, Librarian, Monk

**Background Options:** Backing or Sanctum

#### Creator

You're an artist or entertainer of some sort or another, earning your living by making others laugh, think or simply relax.

**Examples:** Dancer, Circus Acrobat, Stage Magician, Musician

**Background Options:** Influence or Reputation

#### Defender

You crusade against society's wrongs.

**Examples:** Muckraker, Politician, Police Officer, Missionary

**Background Options:** Contacts or Influence

#### Foreigner

You're not in your home country for one reason or another, whether to start a new life or to escape your old one.

**Examples:** Diplomat, Immigrant, Royalty in Exile

**Background Options:** Allies or Resources

#### Gambler

Risk is what makes life palatable.

**Examples:** Card Sharp, Bookie, Stuntman, Barristormer

**Background Options:** Contacts or Mentor

#### High Class

You come from wealth and are used to commanding great financial resources.

**Examples:** Duchess, Business Tycoon, Eccentric Millionaire

**Background Options:** Followers or Resources

#### Low Class

Your whole life has been a struggle to keep shoes on your feet and a roof over your head.

**Examples:** Revolutionary, Criminal, Laborer

**Background Options:** Cipher or Contacts

#### Middle Class

You had an average upbringing, with some hard times and some luxuries.

**Examples:** Chauffeur, Police Officer, Greengrocer, Accountant

**Background Options:** Ally or Contacts

#### Military

You're enlisted in (or possibly retired from) some form of armed service, or you were the child of military personnel and were raised in that disciplined milieu.



**Examples:** Sailor, Soldier, Pilot, Mercenary

**Background Options:** Backing or Followers

## Mystery

Your past is shrouded in conjecture or is entirely blank, either deliberately or due to some vagary of fate.

**Examples:** Spy, Fugitive, Amnesiac, Orphan

**Background Options:** Cipher or Nemesis

## Outlaw

Somehow you have ended up on the wrong side of the authorities.

**Examples:** Mobster, Bank Robber, Fugitive, Smuggler

**Background Options:** Contacts or Reputation

## Philosopher

Occupied with matters of the mind.

**Examples:** Scientist, Poet, Theorist

**Background Options:** Followers or Sanctum

## Pioneer

You push at the world's boundaries.

**Examples:** Artist, Inventor, Explorer

**Background Options:** Gadget or Reputation

## Saint

You do good works or studiously avoid wickedness.

**Examples:** Priest, Moralizer, Samaritan

**Background Options:** Followers or Influence

## Tinkerer

Not only do you find out what makes things tick, you make them tick better.

**Examples:** Mechanic, Watchmaker, Inventor

**Background Options:** Gadget or Sanctum

## Nature

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. This is as true of personality as it is body and mind. Your personality — who “you” really are — is stretched between *strengths and shortcomings that form a dynamic whole* — a personality made up of equal parts hubris and heroism. To model these, each **Adventure** character has a Nature divided into two parts: Virtue and Vice. The Virtue comes from what he believes is fundamentally true about the world and himself. When his viewpoint is validated, he gains self-confidence and can act with greater effect, as reflected with Willpower (see p. 151 for more). A Vice indicates the temptations that exert the strongest lure for the character. When the character gets into a situation that plays to his Vice, he has a choice: He can indulge his baser nature, or he can spend a point of Willpower to resist.

The circumstances in which Willpower may be gained or spent are specific to each Nature. Some may occur much more frequently than others. So that one Nature doesn't outstrip any other in its ability to provide (or subtract) Willpower, the Storyteller should restrict specific opportunities to once per scene. An upper limit

of three instances per game session is also recommended. Similarly, the Storyteller should keep an eye out for players who push the story in a certain direction purely for more Willpower. Still, there's nothing wrong with roleplaying the scene in keeping with a character's Virtues and Vices. They are essential guideposts to the character's personality and temperament, after all.

**Example:** *Serge is creating a blues musician, Mississippi Slim. He chooses Expert for his Virtue (in this case, an expert musician). Slim sees himself as a great performer, and when that image is confirmed, he gains Willpower. For Slim's Vice, Serge chooses Hedonist. Good times are Slim's reason for being.*

*In the course of play, Slim pulls out his harmonica while waiting for a train in Georgia. His performance gets those around him stomping and applauding. Because he's demonstrated his expertise appropriately for the story, he gains a Willpower point. As he gets on his train, a woman leans in, raises an eyebrow and says “Want to meet in my compartment for a private performance?” Slim knows that messing around with a white woman can get him in serious trouble, but if he wants to resist the thrill, his player must spend Willpower.*

*Note that if Slim had chosen Hot Shot as his Virtue, going with the woman would actually gain him Willpower — because risking their necks is what Hot Shots do best.*

Each Nature below has a Virtue and a Vice component; choose one for each aspect of your character as appropriate. Often, the circumstances that provide Willpower as a Virtue take it away as a Vice. As a result, it's rare for a character to have the same Virtue and Vice.

## Architect

The majority of people are like worker ants. They scurry around with little understanding of their place in the larger scheme. A few (you, for instance) are like the queen ant — the architect who assigns the tasks of the workers, who designs the hill and the tunnels and who has a vision focused on the entire colony, *not on a single grain of wheat or sand.*

**Virtue:** You consider the big picture and have the dedication to make the image reality. Gain Willpower when you take a concrete step toward attaining your greater goal.

**Vice:** Others' ideas suffer your scorn and outrage. Spend Willpower or resist following someone else's plan, or become enraged when a flaw is indicated in your own machinations.

## Bravo

There is weakness. There is strength. All the moral philosophizing in the world cannot erode these two immutable truths. Some people are strong because they choose to be; they are respected because they have the power to compel respect. Others are weak because they choose weakness. There are some who have weakness



thrust upon them and some who have unearned strengths, and they must be evaluated individually. But the dynamic between strength and weakness is primary to all human interaction, which is why you pursue strength with unwavering intensity.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you defeat a seemingly equal (or superior) foe or force him to back down.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower when you defeat a foe (in combat or social interaction), or else you must pause to gloat on the victory and explain in detail how it came about.

## Caregiver

The world is not fair, which is why human beings must strive for fairness. The world is not kind, which is why people must be kind to one another. The world is not safe, which is why we should always try to help and protect each other. Mercy, justice and empathy are the unique provenance of humankind — the only way we can collectively survive is through individual caring. You're fortunate to have gifts to offer others: If you refuse to use them, what good do they do?

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you receive tangible proof that you have helped another.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist offering aid when someone is in apparent distress (whether as obvious as a begging vagrant or as subtle as a mysteriously forlorn young woman).

## Charmer

People like to be happy, and you're good at making people happy. You know just what they need to hear in order to feel good, and it gives you genuine pleasure to give them what they need. It may not be the truth — but deep down, who wouldn't rather be happy than right?

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you clearly provide comfort and good cheer to another.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower in order to tell anyone something you think they *don't* want to hear.

## Cynic

Anything that can go wrong, will, at the worst possible time, in the worst possible way, with the most possible witnesses. Then, it will start to rain. Sure, good things *do* happen. But relying on them is just plain foolishness. Isn't it better to expect the worst and either be (1) prepared for it or (2) pleasantly surprised when it doesn't happen?

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you have a backup plan in place when things go sour.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower when you take advantage of a lucky break (as opposed to something you or someone else planned and worked to get).

## Expert

You have passionately devoted your life to excellence in a single field. Other people can be "well rounded," but you think that the hunter who chases two rabbits loses both. Only through concentration can you hope to reach your full potential. (Indicate what talent the expertise is associated with — Expert Pilot, Expert Financier, Expert Academic, etc.)

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you teach your chosen skill to someone or whenever you make a particularly impressive showing with that ability.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist any opportunity to show off your prowess.

## Explorer

Yetis in the Himalayas! Dinosaurs in Scottish lochs! Uncharted islands peopled by unknown cultures! Mysterious "spokes of light" sighted in the Gulf of Oman! All these incredible, fascinating, unimaginable marvels are out there, just waiting for someone bold enough to find them. *What are you waiting for???*

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower whenever you make a significant discovery.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist rushing forward blindly in pursuit of a juicy lead, however intangible, with no regard for the consequences.

## Fanatic

Faith is the underlying sustenance for all humanity. The unenlightened and the selfish make futile attempts to live a safe life that ultimately blinds them to the greater possibilities in the universe. Belief in something greater than the mundane individual — whether an organization or a higher power — will sustain even the most frail of people under the harshest of circumstances.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when belief in the rightness of your cause is confirmed as events unfold.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist making a sacrifice — any sacrifice — to your cause.

## Follower

You recognize your limitations. You've got skills, and they're valuable, but leadership ain't one of 'em. That's okay. Leaders, no matter how impressive, don't get far without followers. In fact, a good follower can be worth his weight in leaders. Don't believe me? Then stack a group of 10 leaders and one follower against the opposite and see which side does better.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when carrying out your assigned duty is a vital aspect of the mission's success.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to take the leadership role in a situation or whenever you disobey an order from someone in charge.

## Hedonist

Life exists to be enjoyed. If that wasn't so, why would we enjoy enjoyment so much? If we're all built to experience pleasure, isn't seeking pleasure just common sense? Sure, it's possible to go overboard — but as long as no one gets hurt, bring on the Garden of Earthly Delights!

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you have a truly good time (and bring others along for the ride).

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist physical pleasures. (This expenditure may not be necessary if the temptation has recognizably certain and severe consequences.)



## Hot Shot

How do you know what you can do until you try something you think you *can't* do? Testing limits is the only way to discover your own — and the only way to push beyond them. You're never going to accept being half your best, and if that means you have to crash sometimes — well, that's the price of being alive.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you survive a dangerous situation that you deliberately entered.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist indulging in an obviously foolhardy venture, especially if it has no direct bearing on your goals.

## Jester

Is there any social occasion that can't be improved by a tasteful joke or good-natured jest? Surely not. People like to laugh — in fact, they *need* to laugh. If we couldn't step back sometimes and regain a sense of proportion, we'd all go insane. Serious situations — danger, want or pain — are when people need *more* humor, not less. Those are the times we're at the greatest risk of losing our humanity, and laughter is the golden road back to it.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower whenever you lighten a mood or ease a tense situation.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to refrain from shooting your mouth off in inappropriate circumstances.

## Leader

You excel at perceiving people's real worth and applying them where they can be most effective. Organization comes naturally to you and so does mediation among your followers. People look to you for leadership because they trust your vision — and you'll be damned if you're going to let them down. The chain is only as strong as its weakest link, though, and you'll do whatever it takes to make sure everyone under your command is up to the challenge.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when others succeed because of your plans.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist punishing an underling who failed to carry out an order to your satisfaction.

## Paragon

You know what's right and what's wrong, and compromising with wrong when you're right is *more* wrong than just being wrong in the first place. Right? You have a duty to yourself to do good — but more than that, a duty to humanity. Of course, adhering to a strict and inflexible standard of right and wrong can be difficult and wearying even in the best of times.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when you accomplish a task by sticking to your enlightened ideals.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to forgo your self-righteousness and accept a compromise.

## Perfectionist

You have no patience for the sloppy, slipshod backwork that passes for tolerable when whitewashed

with the odious phrase “good enough.” To you, something is never good enough until it's as good as it can possibly be. If that upsets the people who are too lazy to do a decent job, well, they can all go straight to hell.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when your painstaking planning covers even unforeseen complications in the execution.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower whenever you have to trust a plan or device that is cobbled together or jury-rigged.

## Skeptic

Science of the day is tearing down many long-held beliefs regarding mankind, the world in which he lives and the cosmos as a whole. Rules of creation are being thrown by the wayside in favor of new “discoveries” as far-fetched as any old wives' tale. You don't see the point of abandoning beliefs that have stood the test of time in favor of crazy new ideas slapped together by some overeager scientist.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower when adherence to tried-and-true methods proves effective.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower or completely disregard any incidence of intuition, non-traditional deduction or mysticism.

## Survivor

They can't keep you down. No matter what it takes, no matter what life throws at you, you can take it. Others may crumble at the first sign of adversity, but not you! You'll pull through whatever the odds... even if it means sacrificing others.

**Virtue:** Gain Willpower whenever you survive a difficult situation through your own cunning and perseverance.

**Vice:** Spend Willpower to resist taking an action that will protect you in a crisis — no matter what the other consequences of that action are.

## Allegiance

Each adventurer is an individual and, ultimately, succeeds (or fails) on his own merits. Only the foolhardy go it completely alone, though. Other players' characters form the core of your character's support group. Similarly, your character likely has connections through his Backgrounds to which he maintains some loyalty. Allegiance refers more to your character's philosophical or cultural ties; it's an indication of a larger entity or organization to which he feels a strong commitment. This commitment can be based on anything from patriotism to religious faith to philosophical sympathy.

This allegiance (supplemented by Backgrounds such as Allies, Backing and Mentor) defines the organization or philosophy to which the Inspired adheres, if any. The Storyteller has a hand in this; she is perfectly within bounds to say, “This series is about an Æon Society branch team, so all characters have allegiance to Æon,” or, “The characters are all members of the criminal underworld, so allegiance to a law enforcement agency isn't appropriate.”



This doesn't mean *every* series must have all of the players' characters sharing a common allegiance. Perhaps a Branch 7 operative and an IDA detective are both ferreting out potential criminal contacts within the Ponatowski Foundation. They join forces with a Foundation member who suspects that her explorations are benefiting illegal ends, and eventually, the cabal requires the expertise of the Æon Society. Viola! A truly mixed group of allegiances, sharing common pursuits.

Along similar lines, there's always the possibility of a mole. In a series tentatively about the Æon Society, perhaps one of the characters is actually monitoring the group for Branch 7. Does he remain true to his mission or become sympathetic to his Æon colleagues? Even if your character is on the up and up, he need not broadcast his true allegiance publicly. It's common for adventurers (especially those involved in clandestine activities) to keep their allegiance under wraps. Likewise, a player need not tell other players.

The organizations described below are intentionally only a sampling of the possible allegiances available in **Adventure**. Although the ones most likely for Inspired to associate with, they aren't the only ones in existence. In the wake of the Hammersmith disaster, everything is new — characters may wish to establish their own "gentlemen clubs" or international intelligence organizations to face the challenges of tomorrow. Additionally, you might want your character linked to an existing national government such as Australia or a private institution such as the Smithsonian. With the Storyteller's assistance, use the allegiances described below as a guide to creating your own.

When picking an organization, keep in mind the potential and freshness inherent in **Adventure**. None of the groups here are particularly historic or monolithic. If your character isn't a founding member, he is at least among the first individuals to join the organization. And while most world governments have been around for a long time in comparison, there are so many changes in the offing across the globe that an enthusiastic individual has every chance of standing out from his more hidebound peers.

## Allegiance and Backgrounds

Allegiance allows for tremendous variety in everything from individual character interaction to the direction of the series as a whole. There is a game benefit to having an allegiance, aside from the roleplaying opportunities it presents. Each allegiance gives the character a free point in Backing for the group to which it's related. Many allegiances suggest more Background expenditures and may influence other aspects of your character. It is not mandatory that a character must have an allegiance, however. If your character is a loner, lacking an ideological connection to any group, write "Independent" on your character sheet — being independent means your char-

acter doesn't get that free Background point, though.

## The Æon Society for Gentlemen

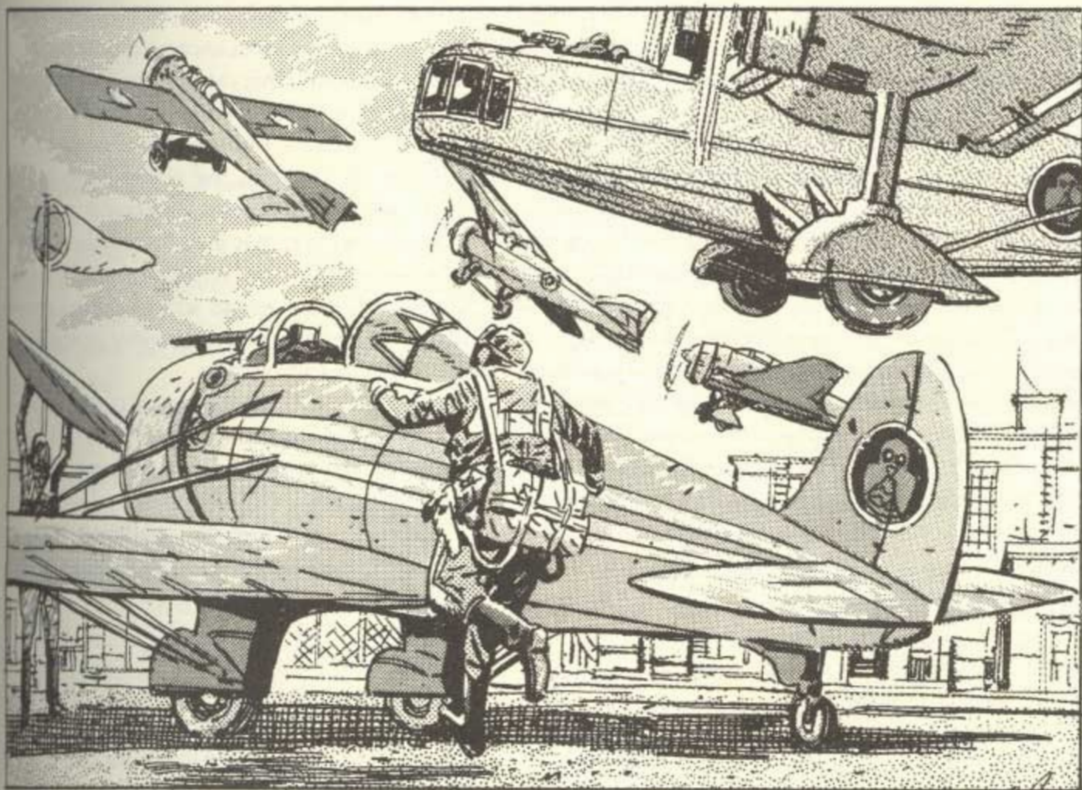
The Æon Society pursues perhaps the most ambitious project ever undertaken: Discover the true potential of humanity, and remove whatever obstacles threaten that destiny's fulfillment. To achieve this end, the Æon Society recruits people who have realized their own potential. Aside from a basic confidence in humanity's promise, any sort of genius or intrepid soul might garner an invitation to this "gentleman's club." Explorers who have braved the darkest places, inventors whose ingenuity has redefined entire fields of study, pilots who have arisen from the first generation of dog fighters to be counted among the best in the world — the possibilities are many indeed. Occasionally, Æon recruits members whose talents are less exciting — the chapter in London, for instance, boasts a member who is fluent in 32 languages and is one of Europe's most celebrated concert pianists.

The Æon Society is more a club than an organization. Although Maxwell Mercer and a few of the founding members are the de facto leaders, they don't exactly hand down marching orders. In the Æon Society, most decisions are made socially or in response to some sudden development. Over cigars, two physicists may discover that they have a common interest and decide to share their research. Upon discovering an ancient Viking burial site, an explorer might call an expert on Nordic culture, an associate conducting similar research and a known stalwart to keep the expedition safe.

Despite this relaxed arrangement, Æon observes a few formalities. It currently has three chapters situated in Chicago, New York and London, with at least another dozen to establish themselves within the year. Each chapter conducts monthly meetings, mostly fund-raising or charity events with a separate, usually brief, meeting of the Æon associates during the evening. Aside from regular meetings, most associates visit their chapter houses regularly. Those who don't are often tracked down by their fellows to see if some grave harm has befallen them. Still, few members of the Æon Society need encouragement to stay active in the organization. They are, on the whole, a passionate and eager bunch.

**Suggested Backgrounds:** The greatest benefit of belonging to the Æon Society is its network of exceptional members who often have extensive networks of their own. Most have ratings in Allies and Contacts. Since Æon members are the most accomplished in their fields, many have Influence and Resources. Thanks to the efforts of associated scientists and inventors, members often have access to gadgets. Newer members sometimes have mentors, established Æon associates who sponsored their entry to the society. Ranking Æon personnel don't lord it over new members, so Backing is emphasized less than it might be with other allegiances.





## The Air Circus

The pilots of the Air Circus are a raucous and unkempt bunch. Whatever the city in which they live, they can often be found at the local speakeasy (where some are known to drink to excess). They recount stories of tailspins and dogfights, nosedives and near-misses, with a jollity and volume that could be overheard over the roar of a Kinner engine. They are known to scuffle with friend and stranger alike only to buy a round for the house minutes later, all transgressions forgotten. What can you expect from a group that supports itself by defying death?

While many of the members travel the country with the Carnival of the Air, America's most successful traveling air show, the Air Circus itself is little more than a social club for barnstormers, smugglers and wings-for-hire. Many of its members perform with the Carnival only when it sets up in a nearby town, if at all. But air shows are known to draw danger — with huge crowds and near-death on display, trouble rarely keeps its distance. Outside the Carnival, members of the Air Circus hire themselves out for sundry jobs. No destination is too Godforsaken, no cargo too hot to handle. For the members of the Air Circus, the challenge is the thing.

This loose brotherhood serves as a support, communications and safety network, and the Carnival of the Air is its heart and soul. Though the most famous associates of the Air Circus are ace pilots, many of the group's members are drawn from the legions of workers who make the Carnival of the Air the spectacle that it is. Members also include trusty mechanics, savvy barkers, Vaude-

ville performers and the legions of promoters who make the show such a success.

**Suggested Backgrounds:** Other than the basic backing, members of the Air Circus often go for contacts. They're an eclectic, sketchy bunch, though, so it's not uncommon for one flyer to have high resources, another a gadget (perhaps a souped-up racing plane), someone else a sanctum and so on.

## Branch 9

With a few exceptions, only three types of people know about Branch 9: Heads of state, the "Operators" who work for it and the enemies who cross paths with it. Many of those who belong to this last group can never divulge their knowledge — every Branch 9 Operator has a license to kill.

Secrecy is watchword of Branch 9. Though it has offices all over the world, they aren't in contact with each other. Each office is run by a head of the branch who answers to the host country's head of state. Each branch head has a personal assistant and no more than five Operators under his command. Though Branch 9 deals with some mundane matters that have escaped the notice of lesser intelligence organizations, its Operators can expect most of their assignments to be for high stakes, against everyone from master criminals to regional warlords and despots. Operators do investigate crime as part of their duties, but they usually leave that kind of thing to the IDA. Branch 9 is more interested in the world's political climate and the secrets hoarded by those in power.



As such, Branch 7 Operators are selected from the elite of the intelligence community, or, less often, from the growing pool of individuals who possess a bizarre but undeniable knack for the spy game.

**Suggested Backgrounds:** Compared to members of other organizations, Branch 7 Operators have the least Background diversity. Each has Mentor to reflect his ongoing training in the sciences and martial arts. Backing is boosted from the starting one dot. This not only reflects the Operator's standing in Branch 7, but also the organization's ties with world governments. Finally, each has some Resources to denote the discretionary fund available for everything from bribes to requisitioning necessary equipment in the field. It's not uncommon for an operative to have one or more one-dot gadgets representing special gear — fireproof suits, unbeatable lockpicks, belt radios, advanced automatic pistols and the like. Most also have some level of Allies, Cipher and Contacts to aid their ongoing investigations.

## International Detective Agency

The Pinkertons might have been the first national private detective organization, but the IDA is the first global organization of gumshoes. Its primary goal is to address the increasingly international nature of crime — there's evidence that organized crime in Sicily has immigrated to the United States and that the King of the World is more than a criminal myth.

The IDA has offices in major cities all over the world. An Old Man (a nod to the organization's anonymous benefactor in London) heads each office and employs two to ten "Irregulars." Such personnel are often recruited from local law enforcement and intelligence organizations, though some began their careers as unattached private eyes. While solitary agents handle much of the IDA's work, many of the offices maintain standing units of two to four Irregulars who delegate detective work among themselves. Most of the units spend their time investigating "extraordinary cases" or crimes that seem to involve an Inspired culprit.

Detective work can be a dirty business — though the agency's claim that its Irregulars are "incorruptible" is hyperbole, its exhaustive background checks are designed to weed out the unsavory elements. Most Irregulars are dedicated crime-fighters rather than cynical blackmailers with cameras and guns.

**Suggested Backgrounds:** All Irregulars have some level of Backing and Mentor, representing their affiliation with the IDA and their Old Man. Any detective worth his salt also has a network of contacts and a modest level of Reputation from his previous experience with law enforcement or private investigation. Influence is not uncommon also. A few possess gadgets, forensic technology that's way ahead of the curve.

## The Ponatowski Foundation

Every decent library in the West subscribes to the Ponatowski *Journal of Exploration*. Once a scholarly publication, the journal now takes its cue from the stories writ-

ten about Safari Jack Tallon — melodramatic, overwrought accounts of its explorers uncovering ancient mysteries, published in a form that can be concealed within a math textbook. This new public face is perhaps closer to the organization's nature. Many Ponatowski members are academics, but that becomes, well, academic, when one learns of all the avalanches, cave-ins, plane crashes, ancient traps and curses they endure to make their singular discoveries. To be invited to join the Foundation, a potential associate must not only be a topflight archaeologist, but a capable mercenary when the occasion invariably demands gunplay or seat-of-the-pants escapes.

This puts the Foundation in something of a bind — not only must it find daring academics, but ones that are discreet and controllable. This is made more difficult by recent changes within the organization. The Ponatowski Foundation began as a reputable and honest organization but has since been subtly corrupted to criminal ends. Though most of its associates are unaware of it, their discoveries — supposedly routed through the Foundation to museums or laboratories — are actually sold on the black market to finance the activities of the Czar and a dozen of his silent partners, most of them exiled Russian aristocrats. There have been a few occasions when the Foundation has seen its explorers are more "daring" than "controllable," when an overly curious associate has discovered who his work really benefits....

**Suggested Backgrounds:** Aside from the backing to represent a member in good standing, most associates have a mentor who sponsors their explorations. In addition, many have a decent Resources rating to indicate a healthy stipend and other financial support the Foundation provides. Some also have allies and/or followers who accompany them on their expeditions. Note: Only members with Backing 5 have any idea that the Ponatowski Foundation is actually funded by unwholesome elements.

## Attributes

Attributes measure a character's natural, inborn capabilities. Other Traits represent narrower categories of achievement — skills you can use or knowledge you possess — but Attributes are broader and more widely applied. You use your Dexterity Attribute (for example) to fire a gun or to pick a pocket. It underlies both of those skills because it measures your character's general hand-eye coordination.

A particularly high Attribute (four dots or more) receives a *quality*. This quality describes a narrow subset of tasks within which you're even more impressive. When your quality comes into play with a given task, you can reroll any "10"; any *additional* successes you roll are added on top of the "10." So if a high Intelligence character has a "Linguistic Genius" quality, she is more likely to achieve spectacular results when translating a foreign tongue or trying to recognize an ancient language. Some



sample qualities are listed with each Attribute description. Only one quality may be chosen per Attribute.

## Physical Attributes

### Strength

Virginia Kowalski had to duck her head and turn her shoulder to get through the office doorway. "You gonna open that safe soon?" A gunshot two floors below added urgency to her question.

Stan Polanski, the safecracker, was frantic. "I can't with all this noise!" he cried, his stethoscope clattering against the metal.

Virginia ("Ginny the Giant" to her associates) rolled her eyes. "Fine," she muttered. "We'll just take it with us." That said, she jerked the heavy iron safe out of the wall and went back toward the door, carrying it like a baby.

The Strength Trait measures physical power, pure and simple. A high score equals mighty muscles. Not only is it good for toting, lifting and jumping, it also determines the base damage of most hand-to-hand attacks.

**Qualities:** Athletic, Rugged, Massive, Explosive

- Poor: Weak as a kitten (dead lift 15 kg).
- Average: You're nothing special (dead lift 45 kg).
- Good: Burly (dead lift 100 kg).
- Exceptional: Strong as an ox (dead lift 165 kg).
- Superb: All envy your mighty thews (dead lift 240 kg).

### Dexterity

Mississippi Slim had the audience just where he wanted them. His left hand danced across the frets and his right hand strummed and picked, lightning quick. He got faster with both hands, never missing a note, his hands just a blur. The crowd went wild.

Then he doubled his speed again, and they fell quiet with awe.

Where Strength is raw power, this is grace, speed and finesse — your ability to make your body parts go and do what you want. Dexterity determines accuracy, whether you're shooting pool or shooting your wife's new boyfriend. It's also combined with Wits to figure Initiative.

**Qualities:** Quick, Graceful, Balanced, Accurate

- Poor: You spill your milk. Often.
- Average: You can sink the eightball without scratching, usually.
- Good: Your putts are like butter.
- Exceptional: You started juggling with knives because you heard it was quicker — and you still have all your fingers.
- Superb: You never miss.

### Stamina

Ali Fasad's eyes narrowed. "You lie!" he exclaimed. "No man walks out of the Maddening Desert alive!"

"I didn't say I walked out," Ian replied. "Not on a shattered leg, my friend. No, I was carried."

"Ah. Then you must have ridden an excellent camel."





"No camel." Ian jerked his thumb at a huge, silent man warming himself by the fire. "My friend Hassan carried me."

Stamina determines how long you can exert yourself in a sustained fashion: It's what separates the sprinters from the milers. It also measures resistance to illness, drugs and sucker punches. Stamina determines your base soak pool.

- Qualities:** Hardy, Tough, Unyielding, Healthy
- Poor: You really should quit smoking and drinking and eating those fried butter biscuits.
  - Average: You can run to catch a cab without panting.
  - Good: You can dance all night and work the next day — but not every week.
  - Exceptional: The ladies call you "Everlastin'."
  - Superb: You could run a marathon while smoking a cigar.

## Mental Attributes

### Perception

Daphne simpered as Dr. Konrad Schiltz leaned in to kiss her. She reached in her purse to grab...

...nothing!

"Looking for this?" Konrad asked, holding up her icepick.

"But... how did you...?"

"Oh, please. You claim to be from Alsace, but your accent is pure Provençal. That made me suspicious enough to notice the bulge in your handbag." His eyes narrowed as he put the needle tip to her delicate throat. "Now... who sent you? Not Serrantino, I think. Lord Sheffield, perhaps?"

This Trait determines the acuteness of your five senses.

**Qualities:** Keen Eyed, Sharp Ears, Alert, Detail-Oriented

- Poor: Wha...?
- Average: You notice when a co-worker gets a haircut.
- Good: You spot typos in the news paper.
- Exceptional: You notice when a co-worker gets a manicure.
- Superb: You can identify different types of bats. In flight. On a moonless night.

### Intelligence

Dr. Schiltz frowned but did not speak as he left the Grüber estate. His assistant cautiously said, "Herr Doktor, you're taking Grüber's acquisition well."

"Hrm. That's because it's a fraud. Tibetan ceram-

ics were not that advanced at the time of the Cobra Cult — I don't care what pack of lies Sheffield sold him. Furthermore, firing glazed white porcelain — even if such materials were native to Tibet, and I don't think they were — requires intense heat. In those icy mountains, no one had enough fuel to develop high fire glazes.

"Fuel up the zeppelin. We're going to the Himalayas."

Intelligence measures your ability to apply logic, calculate, remember and learn. It's not necessarily how fast you react — that's Wits. Rather, it's a measure of how thoroughly you think.

**Qualities:** Logical, Abstract, Mathematical, Well-Informed

- Poor: "Shut yer yap. I'm thinkin'."
- Average: You probably have some irrational beliefs, but by and large, you're open to reason.
- Good: You read Shakespeare without the footnotes.
- Exceptional: That slide rule in your pocket ain't just for show.
- Superb: You are a bona fide genius.

### Wits

"Ever been in a song, sweet thing?"

Nothing.

"I'm a blues musician — Mississippi Slim?"

She gave him a sidelong glance. "Sure you ain't Mississippi Ugly?"

"Naw, that's my cousin." He started rapping his heel against the barstool and sang. "Oh, Mississippi Ugly/He had a gal to hug she/lef' him at the altar/and no one 'round could fault her..." He broke off to call after her "Hey, come back and mistreat me some more! It's inspirin'!"

Anyone can come up with a good response, given enough time. But Wits are what you use when you don't have any time at all. Everything from producing a timely, snappy comeback to diving for cover when you see the bomb falling — it's all Wits. Wits combines with Dexterity to produce Initiative.

**Qualities:** Clever, Alert, Crafty, Calm

- Poor: "Yeah? Well... uh... so's yer old man!"
- Average: You can get out of the way of a bad driver.
- Good: You can often come up with a plausible story in the time it takes to say "Wait, let me explain..."
- Exceptional: "One more drink, and I'll be under the host!"
- Superb: Their action and your reaction are almost simultaneous.



## Snappy Comeback

Sharp retorts and clever wordplay are a standby of the adventure genre, but it's difficult to do on the fly. To get around this, people with high Wits scores can conspire with the Storyteller to create artificial situations. For each Wits dot a character has in excess of three, his player can give the Storyteller one note per session with a straight line on it, along with an indication of the sort of person who'd say it. The Storyteller should then do her best to use the line appropriately in that game session. Presumably, the player has the snappy comeback ready to go.

For example, a player whose character is a politician with Wits 4 gives his Storyteller a card with "Snotty woman says, 'If I was your wife, I'd give you poison!'" on it. In the following session, the Storyteller weaves in a situation where some stuck-up matron says just that, allowing the politician to immediately reply "If I was your husband, I'd take it!" If he had Wits 5, he could offer a second note with "Offended man says 'You, sir, are drunk!'" allowing him to put down the snotty woman as above and tell her offended companion "And you're a fool — but in the morning, I'll be sober."

## Social Attributes

### Appearance

"I'm sorry, Sister," Craig said, peeking out the drawn shades of the hut. "Normally, I'd never ask you to discard your habit, but it does stand out — even in Shanghai — and the Black Mandarin Tong isn't about to... to..."

He'd turned just in time to see her shake long blonde curls out of her wimple. Coupled with a pair of his trousers and one of his shirts — big enough on her that he could see a lovely expanse of white neck, even with the top button done up — she certainly didn't look like modest Sister Chloe anymore. Not at all.

Appearance is a measure of how memorable you look. This rating doesn't always reflect exceptional beauty — a high Appearance could also represent someone of striking ugliness! Since people often stick by a first impression, Appearance can be very important when it comes to social interaction.

- Qualities: Seductive, Stunning, Hideous, Fascinating
- Poor: Your alias is "whatsizname."
  - Average: No one's going to put you on *Vogue*. Sorry.

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Good: If you're pretty, you can turn heads. If you're ugly, you can turn stomachs.

Exceptional: One way or another, your looks can cause car accidents.

Superb: The only word for it is "unforgettable."

## Manipulation

"This sure is Fonny cigarette," the police chief giggled in his heavily accented English.

"Well, I roll my own," Slim smiled, waiting.

"You a fonny man, Sleem. You still go to jail unless you pay fine, but you fonny." The chief looked around aimlessly and giggled again. "I'm hongry. Are you hongry, Sleem?"

"No, but don't let me stop you."

As the chief stumbled out of his office looking for a snack, Slim waited, waited, then ransacked the man's desk. By the time the chief returned with a gigantic beetroot sandwich, Slim had found enough money for the bribe.

The ability to convince people that what they really want to do is what you want them to do is called Manipulation. It doesn't have to involve a callous willingness to treat people like expendable pawns — but it often does.

Qualities: Reasonable, Persuasive, Dishonest, Charming

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Poor: What you see is what you get.

Average: "Man, that bass I caught was *this big*!"

Good: Your lawyer has (admirably) called you a "devious, treacherous snake."

Exceptional: People line up to take your falls.

Superb: What you get is every thing you see.

## Charisma

Dr. Konrad Schiltz cut a dashing figure in his flight gear as he paced in front of his crew. "On this expedition, there will be little comfort but much danger. Little chance of profit, but much chance for loss. You will not be rested, but tested, and for what? Money? Fame? If that's what you think this mission's about, leave now. I'll even pay half your promised wages: Just walk away.

"But if you do, know that you are missing a chance not only to see a legend, but to become part of it. If that interests you, then I want you on my crew. Who's with me?"

Charisma is leadership, magnetism, inspiration... all the things that can take a number of people and fuse them into a team with a unified purpose. Charisma is the indefinable essence that makes crowds hang on a speaker's every word.

Qualities: Incendiary, Soothing, Hilarious, Suave



- Poor: When someone tells you to shut up, you're glad that they at least noticed you.
- Average: You can make an OK speech with preparation and practice.
- Good: People gather around to hear your anecdotes.
- Exceptional: You're a spellbinding speaker.
- Superb: Your words could start a riot — or prevent one.

## Abilities

Where Attributes represent a character's innate abilities, Abilities reflect his learned skills. As such, they are narrower than Attributes — Strength is used for both Archery and Brawl, but Brawl is rarely rolled with an Attribute other than Strength.

A *specialty*, bought with bonus or experience points, represents an even narrower skill area. You may take up to three specialties per skill; when your character's specialty comes into play, you add another die to your pool. So, if a character has two dots in Brawl but has a "Cheap Shot" specialty, he effectively has three dots in Brawl whenever he tries to pummel a groin or gouge an eye.

Usually, five dots are the most skill a character can attain in a given Ability. If your character already has five dots in an Ability, you can use transformation points buy an additional *sixth* dot. This peerless degree of expertise is called *Ability mastery*; the character is considered an innovator head and shoulders above his peers. Further, Ability mastery is required for a character to make super-science inventions; see Chapter Five for more details. (A character with Ability mastery and a related specialty commands an impressive seven dice before adding his Attribute score!) You may purchase Ability mastery only once for a specific Ability and for a total of no more than three separate Abilities.

## Strength Abilities

### Archery

Officer Monroe glared at the corpse, as if it was his fault someone had put an arrow right between his eyes.

"I guess that explains why no one heard a thing," Monroe's rookie partner Murch said.

"Yeah. Silent, doesn't leave powder burns, no muzzle flash... about the only problem is you can't stick it in your coat pocket when you leave."

"Actually sir, the Japanese historically used some bows that were as small as a forearm, though they wouldn't have the penetration to pierce a skull—"

"Murch? Shut up."

Archery is the skill of firing longbows, shortbows, crossbows... pretty much any tension-strung weapon. You can also repair them or, with enough time, make your own.

*Specialties:* Longbow, Crossbow, Rapid Fire, Recurve

### Brawl

Rudy had never heard of Ginny the Giant, so he just saw a fat woman he could bully. "Move it, you tubby bitch," he said.

For her size, Ginny was surprisingly quick. When her fist hit his face and he saw colored stars and dropped to the ground, Rudy realized that he'd made a mistake. When she stomped on his knee with all her weight — 120 kilos — Rudy realized he'd made a very, very bad mistake.

Brawl covers all forms of strength-based fighting — that means everything from boxing with the Marquis of Queensberry rules to wrestling to just plain pounding the tar out of someone. It inflicts bashing damage.

*Specialties:* Groups, Grappling, Kicking

### Might

Slim had done his share of making big rocks into little rocks, but since his release from prison, he hadn't regularly lifted anything heavier than a guitar, a harmonica or a glass of gin. Thus, as he hung out the window of his apartment waiting for the men inside to stop searching, he found his mind drifting steadily away from the question of why these men — white men! — were interested in him. Instead, he wondered how long he could hold on.

Might is the skill used to perform feats of strength. It's not raw power as such — that's the Strength Trait — rather, it's a measure of a character's ability to apply his or her strength, useful for tasks such as ripping phone books in half or bending bars. Each dot of Might adds to a character's dead lift capacity; see page 188 for a reference chart. You cannot have more dots of Might than you have of Strength.

*Specialties:* Arm Wrestling, Smashing, Toting Bales

## Dexterity Abilities

### Athletics

"Run, children!" Sister Chloe wanted to scream it, but she didn't dare call more attention from their black-clad pursuers. She feared that Craig was dead, but she was determined to make his sacrifice count by saving the Governor's daughters.

Looking behind her, she almost went over the cliff before she realized she'd reached it. "What do we do now, Sister?" sniffed Joan, the youngest. Chloe looked down, then back as two of the marauders emerged from the underbrush, swords in hand.

"We pray, then we jump, then we swim. Ready?"

Running, jumping, swimming, climbing, throwing, catching — pretty much every form of general athletic ability is covered by this skill.

*Specialties:* Running, Climbing, Throwing

### Firearms

Serrantino had to shout over the sound of Konrad's gunshots. "Is that the new Luger? Hah! A pistol just like



you — flashy, costly and ineffective.” He returned fire with his own massive Webley revolver.

Konrad had been counting, knowing that the Webley held two fewer shots than the Luger. When Serrantino was reloading, he leaped over the bar, lunged around the corner and put his still-hot gun to his rival’s head.

“And yours is just like you — old fashioned, loud and of limited capacity.”

Whether you’re shooting an ancient dueling pistol or a modern belt-fed machinegun, Firearms is the skill you use for mechanical death-at-a-distance. This Ability also covers general firearm knowledge — how to clean, load and handle a gun.

**Specialties:** Multiple Shots, Cover Fire, Sniper, Exotic Weapons

## Legerdemain

Slim took a moment to compose himself, then walked around a corner and ran straight into a woman in a fur coat. While he stammered his apologies, her companion seized Slim by both lapels and shouted German curses as he shook the lighter man like a bartender mixing a martini. Finally, he shoved Slim aside, and the pair stalked off.

When they were gone, Slim grinned. He’d expected something from the woman’s purse, but the man’s pocketwatch had been an unexpected windfall.

This Ability is a catch-all for any form of tricky, deceptive handwork. Anything from card tricks to picking pockets is covered by Legerdemain. It is also the skill employed by escape artists: Someone good at Legerdemain can pick locks and slip handcuffs as well.

**Specialties:** Shoplifting, Switching Objects, Palming/Planting Objects

## Martial Arts

The girls clung close to Sister Chloe as the black-clad thugs approached, confident grins creasing their cruel cheeks. As one, their swords came out. Chloe glanced desperately at the windows, the door... but she was backed into a corner, no way out....

Then, a blurred shape sprang through the window and felled one of the men with its heavy impact. The other turned and Chloe had time to realize that their rescuer was a man, a blonde man, before his hands and feet shot out, striking their attacker in the face and belly.

“My eyes!” The thug dropped his sword to clutch his face. He tried to run for the door, but a contemptuous leg sweep took him to his knees.

“Don’t...” Chloe whispered, but their grim rescuer smiled viciously, straddled the man from behind and pitilessly broke his neck.

Fighting arts that rely more on speed than power are considered Martial Arts. The masters of mysterious arts such as kung fu, kara-te and jujitsu can disable, cripple and even kill with no weapons but hands, feet and body. Martial Arts attacks inflict bashing damage.

## Specialties: Multiple Opponents, Throws, Strangling Melee

Slim stepped back from Rico’s shove and straightened his jacket. “It’s bad luck to hit a musician,” he warned. Rico just laughed.

“Half the crimeys on two continents are looking, but I’m the one who found you. Sorry Slim, but I’m feeling lucky.” His grin faded, and his fists clenched as he swung at Slim’s belly — full strength this time.

Slim slipped to the side and then Rico shrieked. Two deep cuts were dripping blood down his arm, which now dangled uselessly, the bicep and forearm muscle sliced to the bone.

“It’s also bad luck to crowd a straight razor.”

Hand-to-hand weapons — anything from a spear or axe to a knife or truncheon — are applied with the Melee skill. Many melee weapons inflict lethal damage, so watch out.

**Specialties:** Club, Chain, Bottle, Epee

## Stealth

“There is no honor in sneaking,” Golden Tiger said stubbornly. Sister Chloe sighed in exasperation.

“Perhaps you and your ‘kung foo’ can defeat them all, but the girls and I have no such protection. Besides, what does it gain you to kill so many men?”

“They serve the Black Mandarin,” he replied, the loathing thick in his voice. “They are insects.”

“No! They are still men, even if their cause is misguided. Let them live, and one day, they may might change. Butchering weaker opponents just makes you...” she searched for the Mandarin word for “bully,” but didn’t know it. “...as wrong and evil as they are.”

He glared. “Very well,” he said. “We will crawl past them in the mud.”

“Don’t think of it as crawling. Think of it as ‘travel with humility.’”

Sneaking out of a bad situation is often the better part of valor, just as sneaking into a bad situation is often the better part of curiosity. Stealth is the skill used for all such attempts to move or hide unseen and unheard. Stealth is usually a resisted roll against Awareness.

**Specialties:** Quiet, Ambush, Trailing

## Stamina Abilities

### Endurance

“We will make it back to camp,” Konrad insisted. Looking across the icy expanse, Laura vacillated between hope and despair.

“Upon what, exactly, are you basing that statement?”

“I’ve always made it back before.”

Endurance is your ability to survive severe conditions — icy cold, punishing heat, thin air, hunger, exhaustion, etc. It differs from Resistance because it is long term.

**Specialties:** Holding Your Breath, Resisting Cold, Lean Rations



## Resistance

Lenny the Lush squinted at Ginny the Giant. "Ain't never met no woman who could keep up with me drinkin'," he declared.

"You have now. Set 'em up."

"You seem mighty confident. Care to make a little bet?"

Resistance is a character's ability to withstand the effects of pain, drugs or other incapacitating physical states. It's used on relatively brief, single-episode events: Endurance deals with long term conditions.

*Specialties:* Drinking Contest, Resist Mickey Finn, Endure Torture

## Perception Abilities

### Awareness

"Can you see anything at all?"

"Blurs... I can see shadowy forms today," Chloe replied.

"That's good," Golden Tiger said. "That means the Blinding Equinox Strike is wearing off."

"Was it the same strike I've seen you use?"

"You noticed?" Her other senses compensating for the loss of vision, she could hear the surprise in his voice and felt his weight shift back from her. "No, mine is the Blinding Solstice Strike — it acts instantly, but does not last long. The Equinox Strike is gradual, but lasts for days. Mine is a warrior's technique: His is fit only for assassins."

"That is why Black Mandarin wants me alive. Both strikes combined become the Endless Night Strike — instant blindness, forever."

The thought of it gave Chloe chills.

Awareness gauges how much attention you pay to your senses and how well you interpret their data to stay in touch with your surroundings. Someone who's very aware might understand the importance of something missed by another person with better eyesight (that is, a higher Perception score).

*Specialties:* Tracking, Recognition, Sorting Sounds

### Investigation

Ginny and Al tossed the apartment, searching.

"Well, the safe ain't here and Stan ain't here. What now?"

"Shit. If this was a dime novel, we'd find a matchbook with an address on it."

Someone with the Investigation Ability knows how to find facts, put information together and, generally, solve mysteries. It has its mental aspects (noticing specific details and recognizing their importance) and social aspects (knowing who to ask and what questions.)

*Specialties:* Bounty Hunting, Public Records, Deduction

### Navigation

David smoothed the map with his hands. "I think we'll have to go... here, refuel, double back to here, refuel again and then go on."

"No," Konrad said. "That will take far too long. Sheffield and his dogsleds will easily beat us to the temple. We have to go through... here."

"There's a pass?"

"I've used it on two previous expeditions."

"Won't the weather be a concern?"

"The natives assure me it's always quiet this time of year."

Navigation is used to chart the best course between two points, using map, compass, the stars or other means. People with Navigation rarely get lost. People without Navigation rarely recover from getting lost.

*Specialties:* Astrocartography, Air Travel, Ocean Travel

## Intelligence Abilities

### Academics

"I imagine you learned a great deal at Oxford," Clarence gushed.

"Quite," Konrad replied. "Professor Cescott was absolutely brilliant — the leading archeological theorist of his generation. Other than his lessons, I learned the depths to which cuisine can sink, when guided by an able British hand. And badminton. I learned to play badminton rather well."

Academics gauges how much formal schooling your character has acquired. If he has specialized in a particular field, a specialty may be chosen to reflect that expertise.

*Specialties:* Law, Literature, Mathematics, Biology

### Bureaucracy

"Your desire to take your airship above my city is most... unorthodox."

"I'm sure a region as prosperous and well-run as yours can adapt readily."

"I'm concerned that my citizens will be alarmed."

"Oh, I'm sure they're sophisticated enough to enjoy the spectacle."

"Then there's the matter of paperwork... what sort of supplies are you carrying?"

"Well, food for the expedition, a biplane for scouting, gold bullion..."

"Gold? Why are you carrying gold?"

"Some of the provincial authorities demand bribes. It's a terrible thing, but I have to be prepared to bribe the corrupt. You should be grateful that your district is unencumbered by such parasites."

"I am, I am."

While policy is set at the highest levels, there is always a buffer of bureaucracy between the king, president or commissar and the common man. A man familiar with bureaucratic procedure can get through life with uncommon ease.

*Specialties:* Bribes, Stalling, Administration, Business

### Engineering

Eisenwilder stared down into the engine for a long time, a terrible blankness on his face.

"You know," he said at last, "Theory insists that this device is physically impossible."



"Oh, well, that," Pretorious said with a shrug. "I'm an engineer. I always got poor marks in theory."

Engineers can operate and repair mechanical and electrical devices. With sufficient skill, they can even design and build their own.

*Specialties:* Repair, Jury Rigging, Vehicular Engineering, Death Rays, Weaponsmithing

## Linguistics

"Es muy bien, señor."

"What did he say?" Konrad muttered to Daniel. Daniel's eyes widened.

"You don't speak Spanish?"

Konrad glared. "I can speak Sumerian, I can read hieroglyphics, and I am one of the world's foremost authorities on ancient trans-Himalayan linguistic syncretism. Why would I bother learning Spanish? Millions of people can speak Spanish."

A character starts out fluent in his native language. Linguistics provides fluency in additional language groups. Each dot taken must be assigned to a particular linguistic family. Instead of purchasing specialties normally, each dot conveys a free specialty. Between the specialties listed, most modern major language families are covered. Rolls are only required for particularly tricky writings or speech.

Instead of modern languages, it is also possible to learn ancient ones such as Classical Greek, Latin or the antecedents of a modern language.

*Specialties:* Arabic, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Turkish

## Medicine

"This is going to hurt quite a lot, miss," the samboes said.

"Yeah, yeah," Ginny replied. "Just can the chat and yank it out of my arm, OK?"

Medicine is the science (or art) of curing illness and healing injury. The state of the art in the 1920s isn't to the point that healing can be greatly sped: The main thing a doctor can do is make it as easy as possible for the body to heal itself.

*Specialties:* Oncology, Trauma Surgery, Tropical Fevers

## Science

"You're mad, Pretorious," Eisenwilder said, but his tone was one of admiration.

"No, I'm serious. One day we will talk firsthand with those who carved the Martian canals. We will sail through the ether of space as easily as we now sail through the water of the seas."

"Some barriers are impassible, Pretorious, and the ice-fields encircling Earth's skies are one of them."

The Science Ability represents a grasp of general scientific principles and current-day scientific belief. It's an important skill for understanding the conversations

and publications of other science-minded folks (not to mention for being taken seriously by them). It can even, sometimes, be practically applied — used to concentrate acid, for example.

*Specialties:* Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Wild Theories Survival

Chloe squinted at the pile of twigs and leaves, muttering a soft prayer. Was it... yes! Smoke! Gently, she blew on the sparks and was rewarded by a puff of flame.

"Here you go," she said, handing Minerva her glasses. "Now, we just need to keep that going through the night, and we should be fine. If Mr. Tiger's hands are fast enough to catch fish, we can even have a nice supper."

Survival is the skill of eating, sleeping and remaining alive in unsettled wilderness areas. Food and shelter can be acquired with this skill, though living solely on hunted and gathered rations is very difficult and time consuming, even for an expert. In more inclement conditions (desert, jungle, ice field), this Ability can soften conditions and make Endurance rolls much easier.

*Specialties:* Scavenging, Arctic Survival, Trapping

## Wits Abilities

### Arts

Golden Tiger stared into the fire and quietly asked, "Why did you come to China, Qulo-ee?"

Sister Chloe tilted her head and said "I read a tract that Craig — you remember me telling you about him — had written. He described the conditions here, the suffering, the need.... It was so vivid, I couldn't get it out of my mind. I knew I had to come here and do something. I knew it was God's will."

"Was it God's will that this Ku-raig hide the Governor's involvement in that misery?"

Chloe was silent for a moment. "Perhaps if I'd known, I wouldn't have been brave enough to come."

Arts is used to make lasting art objects — sculptures, novels, paintings, etc. (More transitory arts such as dance or acting are covered by Performance).

*Specialties:* Science-Fiction Writing, Landscape Painting, Playwriting

### Drive

Slim was in the passenger seat and Otis was clinging to the sideboard when the driver's head got blown off.

"Otis! The wheel!" Slim dove across the dead man's lap to push at the brakes.

"No Slim, the gas! They're still on us!" Otis was clinging with one hand and steering with the other. "Not that much gas!"

Cars aren't everywhere in the 1920s, but they're fairly common in Europe and the US. Drive is the Ability used to control them, along with motorcycles and trucks.

*Specialties:* Pursuit, Trailing, Icy Conditions, Trucks



## Pilot

Konrad Schiltz' zeppelin shuddered and shook as it fought its way through the Tibetan peaks.

"We have to turn back!" David shouted, battling the controls.

"No! Onward!" Konrad replied.

"We'll be torn to pieces! She wasn't built for this kind of punishment!"

"We don't have the fuel to make it back! Unless we make it through to Phakding, we'll be stranded!"

Pilot is used to steer and control aircraft and sea vessels. Note that it doesn't include the ability to know where you're headed (that's Navigation). Rather, Pilot covers the knowledge required to keep a ship from capsizing and a plane out of a tailspin.

*Specialties:* Sailboats, Barnstorming, Zeppelins

## Appearance Abilities

### Disguise

Ginny sat in the restaurant, frowning, munching on roasted chestnuts and waiting. That front door was the only way Joey the Barber could get into his apartment, but she hadn't seen him all day. Unless...

Suddenly, she surged to her feet and out into the crowd, knocking people out of her way to grab a portly woman by the shoulder and spin her around.

"Joey!" she cried. "Or is it Josephine, now?"

"Ginny! Didn't expect to see you here in Chicago!"

"Really?" Ginny knocked the hat off his head, and the cheap wig fell too. "That why you're borrowing your mama's wardrobe?"

Disguise is the Ability to use when you want to look like someone else. It's comparatively easy to just appear to be some generic person who doesn't resemble oneself. Resembling a specific other person (Adolph Hitler, Clara Bow or Max Mercer, for example) is much trickier.

*Specialties:* Quick Change, Opposite Sex, Everyman

### Intimidation

"I don't know nothin'," Elroy said nervously, turning away from her eyes.

"Elroy, don't lie to me. I know you're lying. I got a woman's intuition."

"C'mon Ginny, I wouldn't lie..."

Ginny sighed. "You know what's sad, Elroy? How much your rep is gonna suffer when people find out a woman beat you up. It ain't fair, but there it is."

"Ain't no woman beat me up...." Then Elroy saw Ginny rolling up her sleeves. He bit his lip. "Uh, wait a second, maybe I do remember somethin'..."

Whether it be social sanction, economic ruin, incarceration or simply a savage whuppin', you can terrify people with some threat and can either make it stick or (nearly as good) make them think you can. Scared people are often distracted and prone to make foolish mistakes.

*Specialties:* Pre-Fight Psych-Out, Insinuation, Coercion

## Style

Chloe wanted to put the gorgeous red and blue silks away, but she couldn't quite bring herself to stop touching them. "Oh, I can't wear... this..."

"Why not? You'd look beautiful in a gunnysack," Jan said, her young eyes wide as she stared at their new garments.

"Well, I'm not sure looking beautiful is appropriate for me." Still, it wouldn't hurt to just hold the robe up and look in the mirror...

Some people are born looking good, and some people have to put in the hours and the effort. But it doesn't matter how hard you try to look stunning — if you ain't got Style, you're just going to look stunningly silly.

*Specialties:* Couture, Seductive, Homespun

## Manipulation Abilities

### Animal Handling

Slim looked at the horses dubiously. "Otis, ain't you listened to the song? The only thing I want sliding between my legs is someone sweet and petite on a clean sheet, remember? That horse ain't none of that."

"Slim, we can't be choosy. That funny-looking guy with the goggles just came out of the bar!"

"Shit! If that's the case, call me Cowboy Slim! Now, how you get on one of these?"

Horses and other domesticated riding animals are still popular transport in the 1920s (after all, you can't take a car off road for long or fuel it with hay). Animal Handling includes the skill of staying on such a creature and guiding it where you want it to go.

More than that, Animal Handling is the skill of training, understanding and dealing with the animals of the earth. If you want to breed dogs or keep rare pets in captivity, you need a dot or two in this Ability.

*Specialties:* Racing, Training, Quick Rapport

### Interrogation

Gerald plugged Slim's bonds into the battery. "Scream away," Gerald said, pulling the plug. "No one can hear."

"Why are you doing this?"

"To get the plans to the Tesla Refiner, of course."

"Never heard of it."

"For your sake, I hope that you are lying and about to stop." He reached for the battery again.

Getting information out of an unwilling subject can require guile, cunning and a circuitous string of questions. Or it can require truth serums and severe pain. Either way, data extraction requires skill — otherwise the results can range from meaningless prattle to deliberate deception to death.

*Specialties:* Trick Questions, Drugs, Pain

### Savvy

"Got a match?" Slim asked. The Sicilian looked at him suspiciously.



"You roll your own, I see."

"Uh huh. I'm a little low on the leaf, though. If you know what I mean."

"I might know a... tobacconist... who could help you."

When one wants to deal with a criminal — be he a made mobster, a common hoodlum or just the crooked supply sergeant at the army base — it's essential to have Savvy in order to recognize him (or her) and deal without getting pegged as either a mark or a stool pigeon.

**Specialties:** Racketeering, Smuggling, Information Subterfuge

One of Konrad's bodyguards tried to keep David back, but the pilot was so angry he drew his pistol. Schiltz gestured for the guard to step aside.

"Is there a problem, David?"

"You told me we didn't have enough fuel to turn back. Today, I find out we had plenty."

"Your point?"

"You lied to me! You lied and risked all our lives!"

"You knew it was dangerous when you signed on." Casually, Konrad pulled a paper from his breast pocket and put it right in front of David's gun. "Before you shoot me, you should know that the powder burns will destroy our expeditionary visa."

"So we'll get kicked out of the country? Even better."

"No," Konrad said patiently. "The zeppelin will be deemed a hostile incursion into foreign airspace. Not only will you be imprisoned and probably executed, along with the rest of the crew, it will cause a major international incident."

David grimaced and lowered his pistol. Konrad smiled and put his supply list back in his pocket.

Sometimes the truth hurts. Sometimes it's necessary to shield others from the harsh effects of the truth (not to mention oneself). Subterfuge is the art of gently occluding the truth from those who can't or shouldn't handle it.

**Specialties:** Playing Dumb, Lies of Omission, Lawyer

## Charisma Abilities

### Command

"Get below and dive!" Pretorius commanded.

"Captain! The interior hatch mechanism is broken!"

"Then I'll stay out and close it manually!"

"But captain... if we dive, you'll be left out here!"

"I'm aware of that. But if we don't dive, they'll hole the deck on their next pass."

"But you'll die!"

"Get below and dive! That's an order!"

Command gauges one's ability to lead followers. It involves organization, personal carriage and communicating the importance of individual actions.

**Specialties:** Military, Social Leadership, Secret Society, Tactics

## Etiquette

Konrad belched loudly and pushed his plate away, a wide smile on his face. "Don't finish it," he muttered to Laura and David. "If you don't leave some food, it means your host was stingy."

Both of them smiled and pushed their plates away as well.

"Now burp," he prompted.

"I can't do that!" Laura whispered, shocked.

"If you don't, they will be mortally insulted, and we won't get any supplies."

Cultures all over the world have different concepts of politeness. Etiquette doesn't automatically provide knowledge of every subculture's mores, but does furnish the sensitivity to prevent most major gaffes. Specific cultures (or geographical areas) can be taken as specialties, providing automatic understanding of their particular customs.

**Specialties:** High Society, Respect, Gangland

## Perform

Chloe was halfway through "Amazing Grace" when she heard an eerie, piping accompaniment from outside the church. Golden Tiger's eyes got wide. "Keep singing!" he hissed. "No matter what!" It was the first time Chloe had seen him afraid.

When the first great serpent crawled across the threshold, thick as her leg and white as snow, she saw why.

"Don't get nervous," he muttered, as more of them slithered through the doors and windows, "But if you hit a wrong note, they'll attack."

Unlike Arts, which is used for lasting creations, Perform is used for transient artistic actions, such as a dance, song or instrumental recital. In other words, Arts is for the playwright, Perform is for the actor.

**Specialties:** Dancing, Singing, Tuba

## Rapport

"Why do you hate us... gwailo... so much?"

The Black Mandarin laughed, mirthlessly. "You ask why? When your people have poisoned my land with your opium? Slaughtered its people with your gunboats and cannon? Made whores of our daughters and slaves of our sons? I thought you would understand: You came here to 'educate' us, did you not? But what have you taught us? That to you, we are all the same — a race of slanty-eyed savages fit only to be robbed, raped and addicted!"

"If you judge us all by the actions of a greedy few, aren't you guilty of the same crime?"

For a moment, Chloe saw a flicker of doubt in the Black Mandarin's eyes. Then he narrowed them and muttered "Take her away."

Rapport is the skill of making intimate emotional contact with others — even if the contact is brief. Without Rapport, real understanding is very difficult, if not impossible.

**Specialties:** Sympathy, Encouragement, Discerning Weakness



## Backgrounds

There's more to a character than his capabilities and skills. Other factors exist that, while not a direct result of his actions, still have a huge impact on your character's lifestyle. Maybe he inherited a big gob of money. Maybe he owns a private airstrip hidden in the middle of the New Mexico desert. Except in special circumstances, Backgrounds usually aren't rolled. You're also expected to explain the scope of your character's Backgrounds to the Storyteller. For instance, if you take Contacts, you have to say what *kind* of contacts your character has. Mississippi Slim's connections might be the yahoos who frequent St. Louis honkytonks. Sister Chloe's contacts are more likely to be missionary clergy, while Dr. Schiltz probably has pals on University archeology departments.

### Allies

*"We've been friends since we were both in short pants. Whatever you need, just ask."*

This Background represents the people who are closest to your character — not just pool hall pals to help him spend a paycheck, but the bosom companions your character would go to for advice if he found out he had cancer. Thick or thin, wrong or right, an ally is there for your character. Is it possible for an ally to betray your character? Sure it is, ask Othello or Julius Caesar. But that's unlikely to happen unless your character treats his ally badly. (If he only goes to see the guy when he needs a body hidden, she'll realize the *real* basis of the relationship.) Friendship is a two-way street, and the chum who bailed your character out last week may be the chump who needs his help right now.

It's important to define the relationship between the character and each ally. Are they all members of the same Masonic group? Childhood playmates? Did some time on the same cell block? Defining the connection gives the Storyteller a much better chance to put your character's allies in the story the way you envisioned them.

An ally is most often a normal person; if the situation calls for a write-up, the Storyteller follows only Phase One of character creation (see Chapter Two). An Inspired character may be an ally, but one who's less powerful than the player's character (for starting characters, give the ally only seven transformation points). The higher the rating in this Background, the more capable the ally. So as to not to overshadow the player's character, the Storyteller should focus more on the Ally's own Backgrounds — connections and assets — rather than creating a powerhouse.

- x You may have friends but no one truly close.
- One non-Inspired ally of moderate ability.
- Two allies, or one Inspired ally.
- Three friends, or fewer of greater power or influence.

••••

Four buddies, or a lesser number who are well connected.

•••••

Five close companions, or a lesser number of truly impressive associates.

### Backing

*"You know who I represent. Do you really want to cross us?"*

Backing represents your character's standing in an official (or unofficial) organization. This organization could be a business, a government office, the military or a shadowy secret society. If your Storyteller agrees, you may take Backing multiple times to represent status in different organizations. (Perfect for double agents.) As with the Allies Background, your character isn't solely on the receiving end of the gravy train here. The group looks out for your character, trusts her with its finances and equipment, gives her leadership over its personnel and so on because it expects the character to further its goals. (Backing from an organization your character doesn't believe in is ripe with dramatic potential, but don't be surprised if the group stops trusting her pretty quick.) As with Allies, a character who abuses the benefits of her Backing must face the consequences, sooner or later.

x

None; you're a grunt with no pull.

•

You're a minor functionary, performing for little recognition, but you have a bit of formal authority to throw around. **Example:** An army sergeant.

••

You've got a stable post with a secretary, acolyte, staff sergeant or other gofer to help you keep your underlings in line. **Example:** A section editor at a major metropolitan newspaper.

•••

You enjoy a poorly defined middle-management post and can do whatever you want as long as you don't make waves. But if you do make waves, you can catch it from both directions. **Example:** Vice-President in Charge of Long-Range Planning.

••••

You have a position of some authority and privilege, with considerable trust from your organization. You would have to make a major mistake to get in trouble.

•••••

**Example:** Catholic Archbishop. You're a mover and a shaker, on a first-name basis with anyone in the organization who could take your power away. **Example:** 33rd-Degree Freemason.





## Cipher

"Skeletons in the closet?" What a charming turn of phrase."

Adventure is set in a world of international danger, intrigue and excitement. That's all well and good, but there are times when your character doesn't want international danger following her home and kidnaping her fiancé. Cipher represents factors that impair those who would delve into your character's secrets. She might have simply led an uneventful life (at least as far as written records are concerned). Maybe your character doesn't have a birth certificate or passport — or maybe she has several of each.

Regardless of how you define her aura of secrecy, each Cipher dot adds an additional level of difficulty to any investigation of your character. If she does something stupid such as leave her business card at the scene of a crime or get photographed holding a gun to the German Ambassador's head, her Cipher rating may suffer.

- x Anybody can dig into your past with a minimum of effort.
- You've got a couple of well-hidden secrets.
- There is a certain amount of uncertainty about your past.
- A mystery wrapped in an enigma.
- Your own mother has to look twice.
- "Who was that masked man?"

## Contacts

"Yeah, I think I know a guy who knows a guy who can help us."

Your character has associates who know things, can supply things or can get things done. The exact nature of their capabilities depends on what you can talk the Storyteller into, but these people are *not* allies. An ally sticks with your character out of a close sense of personal responsibility. Contacts are people who associate with your character out of a sense of self-interest. The guy your character pulled out of a trench in the Great War is an ally. The crooked cop your character slips a double-sawbuck in exchange for the latest precinct gossip is a contact. This Background doesn't ensure that your character's "friend" will help him: You'll have to negotiate and roleplay through that. But it does get your character in the door.

There are major contacts and minor ones. A contact is major if your character sees her often and she has a lot of information and resources at her fingertips. A minor contact has a narrower focus and may know your character only casually (perhaps through a major contact or by reputation). Major contacts can be reached easily, but getting in touch with a minor contact often requires a roll (Bureaucracy, Etiquette or Savvy).

- x No useful contacts; you have to do your own legwork.
- One major contact, and a couple minor ones.
- Two major contacts, each in a different field, and three to five minor ones.



...

Three major contacts spanning several social milieus, and quite a few minor ones as well.

....

Four major contacts — possibly more than one in a given area — and a large number of minor ones.

.....

Five major contacts, and scads of minor ones all over the world.

## Followers

*"We have them on the run now, my loyal comrades. After them!"*

Followers are people who obey your character's orders, for whatever reason. If your character's a businessman, they might be his loyal employees. If your character is in the Navy, they're the sailors under his command. Or they might simply be a group of people who admire, respect and wish to aid your character in his endeavors. That's not to say they're blindly obedient (unless you specify that your character's followers are brainwashed zombies or something). They're ordinary people; if treated callously, they'll likely become disillusioned. Take care to work out your character's followers with the Storyteller, since the Storyteller portrays them.

Followers generally aren't the most skilled people in the world — if they were, they'd have followers of their own. Each follower generally has one particular asset or talent but not the widespread access or abilities of an ally or contact. A follower is considered an extra (see p. 244); sample templates, starting on page 244, have ready-made follower types. A follower cannot be Inspired; such a character must be purchased as an ally. Followers killed in the line of duty are not automatically replaced. New minions are acquired through roleplaying.

x

None; you haven't inspired any one to rally under your banner.

•

Two followers of average ability (equivalent to typical extras), or one who is exceptionally skilled.

••

Five average followers, or a smaller number of more capable lackeys.

•••

10 ordinary followers, or fewer who are better.

••••

18 followers, or a lesser number of improved minions.

•••••

30 normal followers, or a smaller number and more elite retinue.

## Gadget

*"This was my father's sword, and his father's before him..."*

This Background represents a special device unique to your character or something that is simply not available on the mass market. It could be anything from an antique samurai sword of legendary properties ("It's called 'Oil Merchant' because one of the Emperor's bodyguards once cut an oil merchant clean in half with it") to

an invention decades ahead of the current technological curve. A gadget may also be an existing machine concealed or altered in some way — a machinegun briefcase, a boat capable of short flights. These items are rare as hen's teeth, and you need a good explanation why your character has something so esoteric, experimental and/or advanced.

A gadget is likely to be the target of thieves and con men. In the proper circles, the item (and your character's mastery of it) is nigh-legendary, and your character's enemies will go to considerable lengths to separate him from it. Yet, it will always return to him somehow, and it will never fail him when he needs it. If your character's gadget is ever separated from him, coincidence returns it by the end of the story (recovering it may even be the story's focus). A gadget cannot be destroyed except in the most extreme circumstances or by killing its owner.

If your character is of a mystical bent — and many who have gadgets are, even if their superstitions take odd forms — he should take "proper care" of his gadget. Failing to "appease the spirit of the sword" or to perform regular maintenance on the pistol may result in a temporary loss of the gadget's benefits until he makes amends.

To assist in creating gadgets, the different levels refer to equivalent capabilities described in Chapter Five: Super-Science. (An Advanced gadget cannot have more options than are allowed under the relevant super-science category. Assume an Innovative gadget has a dice pool equal to the character's appropriate Trait, contains charges equal to the character's starting Inspiration score plus one, is usable only by the character, adds one to its soak and/or structural levels for durability tests and has an "unlimited" warranty. See p. 183 for more details.)

The Storyteller has the final say on the Background cost of the gadget you want. This Background may be taken more than once for multiple gadgets.

x

None; your gear is standard for the area.

•

The item might have a reputation recognized within a certain subculture or may assist you in performing a given task. In super-science terms, it is an Advancement with up to three options.

••

The item is fairly unique or notably modified, perhaps with a noteworthy reputation. In super-science terms, it is an Advancement with up to five options.

•••

An impressive item with capabilities beyond the norm, likely with a widespread reputation. In super-science terms, it is an Advancement with up to seven options or an Innovation that duplicates the effect of a level one Knack.



\*\*\*\* An extremely rare and powerful item probably recognized by a majority of the world's population. In super-science terms, it is an Advancement with up to nine options or an Innovation that duplicates one level two Knack or two level one Knacks.

\*\*\*\*\* The item is rare and powerful beyond comparison, with a reputation that overshadows that of its owner. In super-science terms, it is an Advancement with up to 15 options or an Innovation that duplicates one level three Knack, two level two Knacks or three level one Knacks. Alternatively, it has some other unique and very significant capabilities.

## Influence

*"A few words in the right ears and I'm sure we can work this out to everyone's satisfaction."*

Instead of concrete authority — with its limits, its clear definitions and its threats of enforcement — your character can apply a certain amount of discretionary social pressure. He's not the general who can send in the troops, he's the ambassador who explains things to the general (or, if the general is disinclined to act, then to the admiral or the head of Foreign Intelligence or...). Influence lets your character mold how people think and feel about certain issues. This need not be a high-profile affair; that's Reputation, below. Many influential people are not terribly well known in public circles — but their power is felt where it counts. The source of this influence could be political or social or even religious. In any event, when your character talks, people pay attention.

x None; you're nobody special as far as anyone knows.

• "Oh, there's no need for you to wait in line, Madame." Your celebrity is mainly local.

•• You're a regional or state influence, such as a mayor or newspaper editor.

••• "Can I have your autograph?" In your area of expertise, you're internationally renowned. Alternatively, you have a broader influence in a smaller area.

•••• Everyone in the country knows *your name, if not your face*.

••••• Your opinions have broad international power.

Your character is the proud owner of one or more unusually able and totally loyal animal companions. Included with this Background are the facilities needed to tend to the character's furry (or feathered or scaly) friends. For instance, if your character has a flock of carrier pigeons, he also has rooftop cages for them. Dogs have kennels, horses have stables, and so forth.

When your character's dealing with animals from his menagerie, you never have to make Animal Handling rolls to convince them to do what your character wants. Rolls for riding in dangerous or tricky situations may still be required: The animal wants to obey, but your character's skill may not be up to snuff. At the Storyteller's discretion, this Background may be used to call wild animals to perform the character's bidding for the scene.

x None; you may have a pet, but all it does is eat, sleep and crap (though not necessarily in that order).

• One special animal (such as a highly trained attack falcon), or a small number of regular animals (such as a pack of a half-dozen hunting dogs).

•• Two exceptional animals (say, a horse like Trigger and a dog like Lassie), or a herd or flock of a dozen lesser pets.

••• Three impressive beasts, or a huge number (30 or so) of ordinary animals.

•••• Four magnificent, intelligent and highly trained creatures (possibly a rare beast such as a gorilla or dolphin), or a ranch of up to 100 normal ones.

••••• Five animal companions, a veritable zoo of regular beasts, or a rare, powerful and totally unique animal Inspired in some fashion. ("Ladies and gentlemen... the eighth wonder of the world... King Kong!")

## Mentor

*"Thank you, Master. Your insight is as illuminating as the rays of the morning sun."*

Your character has someone looking out for her, guiding her along her path and providing protection, training and the benefits of experience. The mentor's reasons for offering these benefits may be obvious and noble ("He's my daddy!") or less of both ("He's just this mysterious man who shows up with advice when I dial this code — way too many numbers — into the phone and trill like a bird"). Whatever motivates him, *your mentor is a powerful figure* who can do a lot for your character.

Although you determine the mentor's basic concept and relationship with your character, the Storyteller handles all

## Menagerie

*"Akla! Uriel! To me!"*



aspects of the mentor's capabilities. Unlike a contact or ally, there's no question of this being a meeting of equals: The mentor considers himself your superior and probably has some good justification. Even if you start out following the same philosophy, there may eventually be a test of your character's loyalty — possibly even leading to a schism. The relationship between a mentor and student is a complex one and can provide a great deal of intensive roleplaying.

- x None; you haven't caught anyone's attention, or you haven't found a patron worthy of your attention.
- Your benefactor is probably a great deal like you, only more experienced and better connected.
- Your mentor has impressive backing and ability.
- The person supporting you has exceedingly broad and deep connections and a great deal of experience when it comes to using them.
- It seems like your patron is everywhere and knows everybody.
- Whoever your mentor is, she's a major player on the international scene.

## Nemesis

*"You?! I should have known you were behind this!"*

Your character's got an enemy, and his history with her goes way, way back. He'd like to put one between her eyes. She'd like to craft a goblet from his skull. Each has a burning, driving urge to stymie, confound and destroy the other. They may not want to actually kill one another (though it's likely), but nothing short of the others' total destruction will do. A nemesis must be an individual person (though she may employ any number of lackeys to cause your character grief). This is not like hating the Ku Klux Klan or some other abstract organization. It's personal.

Having an enemy who hates your character's guts doesn't seem like an advantage at first blush, but there are several ancillary benefits, not the least of which is the sense of purpose she gives to your character's life. If she has other enemies, they're your character's friends (at least nominally). And if your character's nemesis is a known villain, being known as her enemy is probably good for his reputation. For these purposes, your character's rating in Nemesis acts as a Reputation, specific to the rivalry itself.

Such aspects certainly make for a more exciting story, but this Background also offers a rules benefit. When your character knows for certain (assuming doesn't count) that his nemesis is behind the plot in which he finds himself, roll his rating in this Background. Each success provides your character with a point of temporary Inspiration, up to his total capacity. Discovering the nemesis' influence should be a challenge, perhaps the result of multiple games' worth of adventuring. Uncovering the knowledge should be as dramatic as encountering the nemesis face to face. Of

course, your character's enemy can do the exact same thing in response to any plans he makes against her....

- x You don't know anyone who really burns your oil... yet.
- Rivals: Few know of your heated squabbles.
- Antagonists: Your struggle makes for entertaining stories (to others).
- Enemies: Your battles are memorable.
- Hated Foes: Tales of your epic struggle are known far and wide.
- Archenemies: Your conflict is the stuff of legend.

## Reputation

*"Jumpin' Jiminy! D'you know who that is?"*

Charismatic (and terrifying) figures have begun to seize the spotlight on the world stage in the early 20th century. This notoriety is reflected in the Reputation Background. A reputation can be positive or negative. Ruis the Yellow may be known throughout Brazil as the most cowardly thief alive, while only a few souls in The Hague know of the mysterious figure known as Dread Alabaster. Further, the reputation could be accurate or spurious. Ruis the Yellow may indeed be willing to ditch his cohorts at the first time of trouble, while, in truth, "Dread Alabaster" is an urban fiction concocted by a trio of bored university students.

A reputation's truth matters little compared to its impact on those who know of it. You add the Reputation rating to Intimidation attempts and may even apply it to other appropriate social situations. Unlike Influence, Reputation conveys no actual authority. Further, it often acts as a magnet — reporters appear to snap your character's photo when he's trying to follow someone; martial artists keep jumping your character to see if he's really the master he claims to be; most women your character meets are instantly repulsed, having heard of his bizarre sexual conquests. Reputation may be taken more than once for different forms of renown.

- x You have yet to make a name for yourself.
- You're well known in a small area (small town, big-city neighborhood, narrow subculture).
- Your name is bandied about in larger circles (sizeable metropolis, notable subculture).
- Everyone in the region knows well your legend (state, small nation, cultural group).
- Tales of your exploits have spread across the land (a continent, major cultural group).
- Your legend has preceded you even to the far corners of the Earth (everywhere but the most Godforsaken hinterlands).



## Resources

"Money is no object!"

One of the most versatile Backgrounds, Resources represents wealth, pure and simple (or, if you prefer, wealth, dirty and complicated). A character with no Resources isn't completely destitute, but even one Resource dot provides a significant boost to one's lifestyle. Those with high Resources may have stock options, uncut diamonds or good old cashola — in any case, a lot of what it takes to get around. See page 249 for details on using Resources to buy things.

• You get three hots and a cot from somewhere and can scrape together some change to hit the town maybe once a month.

• You've got the money for a decent dwelling and can afford reasonable transportation — if you're in the US or a major European city, you may even own a car.

•• You probably have a decent car to go with your house and snappy wardrobe.

••• You lack little in the way of comfort and can afford a few luxury items such as a large sailboat or a big diamond necklace.

•••• In addition to your primary residence, you probably have a lakefront chateau, hunting cabin or ski lodge. To get between them, you have your choice of cars and possibly a private plane.

••••• You are a bona-fide millionaire, capable of buying just about anything that catches your eye. Enjoy your jewels, minks, champagne and fine art.

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pleasant or unusually secure. A series of three secret rooms under your basement, for instance. Something nice and secure but not really lavish. A remote mountaintop dacha, for example. A more secure site or one with particular advantages, such as a cave whose mist provides visions of the past.

A secure, advantageous site, such as a secret silver mine in the middle of a desert oasis that can only be reached safely by air.

Very secure, and very advantageous: An uncharted island inhabited by amazons who revere you as their goddess-queen.

## Background Enhancements

Inspired characters have access to a unique set of advantages called Background enhancements. You can purchase an enhancement if your character has five points in the appropriate Background, effectively raising the Background to six points — and pushing the Background into realms of which others can only dream. Not all Backgrounds can be enhanced, though the Storyteller may allow new ones as appropriate. Not as strictly regulated as normal Backgrounds, you must engage your Storyteller when defining the nature of your character's enhanced Background. One Storyteller may be comfortable letting your character Legions enhancement give him *thousands* of soldiers, while another might limit him to only 100: It depends on what sort of game she wants to run and what sorts of challenges your character is going to encounter. After all, if your character can simply use his In Charge status to solve every problem, the story will be a dull one. The enhancements are listed below, with the requisite Background for each noted in brackets.

### Artifact (Gadget)

"Behold! The ultimate achievement of scientific genius!"

This enhancement reflects ownership of a significantly powerful super-science apparatus. The Inspired machine is something of truly stupendous proportions. The possibilities are great indeed, with the restrictions mainly being common sense and the scope of the series the Storyteller wants to run. As a general rule, an invention of this scale may duplicate the effects of any Knacks that total the Background's level of six — so it could have six level one Knacks, three level two Knacks, two level three Knacks or any combination thereof. Instead, the invention might provide up to five Advancement options per dot in the Background. You can combine Knack effects and Advancement options any way you like as long as the respective points don't exceed the total Background rating — so the invention might have one level

## Sanctum

"Welcome to my humble abode."

Just as a Gadget represents a unique machine or possession, Sanctum represents a unique location. This location could be an Antarctic "Meditation Mansion," a private island, an underground headquarters, a secret valley — whatever. In any event, it belongs to your character, free and clear. Your character's rating in this Background determines how exotic her sanctum is, how useful it is to her and how difficult it is for her enemies or simply the curious to discover and infiltrate it. The Sanctum score provides your character's lair with a Cipher rating of equal level against any attempts to discover its existence and location. This Background may be taken more than once for multiple sanctums.

• No secret lair, but at least your place is clean, right?

• A place that's either particularly



three Knack effect and 15 Advancement options. You can create capabilities not explicitly described in this book, but the Storyteller has final approval on everything.

Such an amazing item is sure to be sought after by any number of agencies, and its construction, deployment, maintenance and defense could well be the focus of an entire series. You may buy this more than once for separate Five-dot Gadgets.

## Enigma (Cipher)

*"Who I am is not important."*

Your character covers his tracks so well that even his friends can't be certain who he is. Any attempt to learn a secret about your character that he wants hidden fails. Period. Don't even bother rolling. The only exception is if the Storyteller judges that your character was very careless with that secret. Suppose your character's secret is that "Millionaire Kip Kerby and the mysterious vigilante Jet Justice are actually the same person!" No one will make the connection unless your character does something stupid like run around with his face uncovered as Jet Justice. Even then, a ruse as simple as wearing glasses in his Kip Kerby persona can baffle the most astute of observers.

Furthermore, since your character no longer really needs his five Cipher dots, you can distribute them among his friends, allies, contacts, favored cousins and so forth, simply by taking steps to conceal or confuse the evidence trail between them and whatever secret your character is concealing. This must be roleplayed out, but you can allocate some Cipher dots to help disguise your character's sidekick Flying Fairness, some to his fiancée to keep her unkidnaped and so forth. These dots cannot be redistributed once allocated and remain in place until someone pierces the mystery; only then do they return to your character.

## In Charge (Backing)

*"I am the law here."*

Your character doesn't just have authority in an organization — she is *the* authority for the organization. Having a character who's Pope or a four-star general in the US Army is probably beyond the scope of most **Adventure** series (though you never know). With this enhancement, it is quite plausible to be the ruler of a small nation, the ultimate mastermind behind a global conspiracy or the leader of a fledgling religious cult.

Being In Charge is similar, though not quite the same, as having Followers or Influence. Your character wields significant influence if she's in direct contact with underlings, but more often, she is an impersonal figure who rules from a distance. Her orders are carried through proper channels and trickle down to the individual priests/soldiers/employees, who may choose to ignore or alter them. (Also, it would be extremely irregular if a character In Charge of a business did not have *at least* four dots in Resources.)

## Kingpin (Contacts)

*"Yes, I believe I know someone who can help you. In return, I ask a small favor. An inconsequential task, truly."*

Your character doesn't just curry favor with powerful individuals; he is the ultimate arbiter of favor. Your character has many capable folks convinced (perhaps fraudulently) that it is desperately in their best interests to provide him with any favor, information or advantage they can. He has dozens of major contacts all around the globe (and may, with the blessing of the Storyteller, make up new ones on the spot). You never have to roll for your character to meet a minor contact, and he can consequently avail himself of their expertise in just about any field.

Yet, cooperation does not mean abject worship. It's one thing to have a contact fawn over your character, take him to an expensive dinner and let him stay in her luxurious guest house. It's quite another to hit her up for a million dollar loan or ask her to commit murder at your character's convenience. A Kingpin gets to his lofty position by knowing his limits, so rein in your enthusiasm when your Storyteller sets them.

## Legions (Followers)

*"Send the first battalion around the valley, and hold the third in reserve; I shall lead the second battalion down myself"*

In addition to the followers provided by the Background of the same name, your character also has a vast number of other people who are willing to do what he says. This vague enhancement should be tailored to your character's circumstances. The most pertinent question is: Why are they following your character? Is he paying them? (Better have some powerful Resources, or better yet, the Wealth Beyond Avarice enhancement.) Are they loyal to his cause? (You might want to buy some Backing.) Are they impressed by your character's personal philosophy? (Then he better well meet you're his standards; nobody likes a hypocrite.)

Once you and your Storyteller understand why your character's legions are obedient, it's important to get an idea of how many there are, how loyal they are and what they're capable of doing. There is a roughly triangular relationship between these factors. If your character's legions are fanatically loyal expert killers, he's likely to have only 50. If they're a bunch of normal people (or, perhaps, a little more gullible than the norm) who are willing to do what your character says as long as it doesn't get them in any trouble or require much effort... well, then there could be *thousands* of them. As with all Background enhancements, talk it out with your Storyteller until you get something you're both happy with.

## Renown (Influence)

*"I'll be sure to pass your opinion along to the President at our luncheon next week.... What's that? Ah, I was hoping you would see things my way."*

Someone with five dots of Influence is already respected on a global scale in her area of expertise. Renown is higher than that. When your character speaks about her specialty, it's almost impossible to gainsay her words. An influential person can debate with the top minds in their



field. For someone with renown, there is no debate. Anyone who disagrees is probably going to wind up scratching his head and privately reconsidering his beliefs.

While the effects of renown are less potent outside a specified area, they still provide immense clout. Even if your character's renown is in the area of art history, her reputation as a great mind of the 1920s is so firm that people will thoughtfully consider her opinions about military strategy, engineering, global politics, economics — or anything else she can speak on knowledgeably.

## Sanctum Sanctorum (Sanctum)

*"The greatest sultan's palace is but a hovel compared to the glorious majesty of my Citadel of Atlantis!"*

If your character has five dots in Sanctum, she already owns a location that's secure and useful. A sanctum sanctorum is a place that's frightfully secure and remarkably useful. It's invulnerable to infiltration by any but the most immensely capable burglar, and its defenses are sufficient to hold off the entire Russian Army for a week, if necessary.

A sanctum sanctorum can be your chance to put something really over the top into the game. An abandoned fortress on top of the invisible ice cap that floats on top of the Earth's atmosphere, complete with a thunderstorm gun that can be focused on the lands beneath? Sure, why not? Feel like stealing a page from *Mr. X* and deciding that the architects of Washington, D.C. built a secret, interconnecting labyrinth beneath the great buildings, streets and monuments? Sounds like a sanctum sanctorum. A mysterious outpost on Mars that can be reached through one of six "Aetherial Transponders" hidden along the Earth's equator? Go for it.

## Wealth Beyond Avarice (Resources)

*"Lose the attitude, Your Majesty. I could buy your whole country a dozen times over with my pocket change."*

Your character's wealth is so staggering that she can barely keep track of it. It's simplicity itself for her to acquire any mass-produced or common object. In game terms, although your character has an *actual* rating of Resources 5 with this enhancement, the score *functions* as if it were at Resources 8 when making purchases. So, your character may automatically buy any available gear you wish that has a cost of 7 or less. More expensive items may require longer (months or possibly even years) — not because your character can't afford them, but because they have to be made to order. After all, not many zeppelins get built. The plus side is that when your character's buying extremely expensive things such as custom yachts and buildings, she can design them to her own eccentric specifications.

To acquire or construct a unique device, vehicle or building — something that essentially counts as a gadget or a sanctum — you lose dots off your Resources, permanently. Each dot lost gives you eight experience points with which to buy *only* the Sanctum or Gadgets Background. This does mean that the first point spent drops your character from an effective six Resources. It's also possible to

use Wealth Beyond Avarice to thwart the designs of someone equally wealthy. Say your character and her millionaire rival get into a bidding war for the land containing the Valley of Lost Ideas. The players of both characters take turns naming how many dots they're willing to spend; whoever's player is willing to spend more loses that number of Resources dots — but gains the rights to the land and has enough wherewithal to fortify it significantly. The loser keeps his Resource dots — and thus is in a fine position to scheme further for the lost prize.

## Personality Traits

Your character's Nature paints a picture of his personality and general identity, but Willpower and Inspiration indicate how vivid that portrait is. Each Trait is rated on a scale of 1 to 10, instead of the standard 1 to 5, and has two tracks: the *permanent score* and the *temporary pool*. It's like a gas tank: There's a difference between how much it *can* hold and how much it's holding *now*.

When a Willpower or an Inspiration roll is called for, you roll dice equal to your character's permanent Trait rating. You do *not* have to spend Willpower or Inspiration to make the roll unless otherwise designated by the Storyteller. Put another way: You roll permanent and spend temporary.

## Willpower

Willpower measures the strength of your character's convictions. When his convictions (as defined by his Virtue) are confirmed, you add a point to the Willpower pool, up to the maximum number defined by your character's Willpower rating. In contrast, certain actions during the course of play (including resisting the character's Vice) call for an expenditure of Willpower, thereby lowering the temporary pool. It's not uncommon for the Willpower pool to fluctuate a fair amount in a game.

|            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| •          | Timid       |
| ••         | Hesitant    |
| •••        | Diffident   |
| ••••       | Confident   |
| •••••      | Assured     |
| ••••••     | Certain     |
| •••••••    | Secure      |
| ••••••••   | Determined  |
| •••••••••  | Iron-willed |
| •••••••••• | Unshakeable |

## Using Willpower

You can spend a Willpower point to achieve any of the following effects. Unless otherwise noted, you can only spend one Willpower point a turn.

- **Free success:** Spending a Willpower point gives your character a free success on any action. This is separate from any successes you roll, but you must state that you're spending Willpower before the roll.



- **Resist Instinct:** If a snake surprises your character, his instinct is to jump away and yell. However, if it's imperative that he remain still and quiet, his brain goes to war with his reflexes. Your Storyteller may require you to spend Willpower for your character to win that war.

- **Resist Temptation:** If presented with a situation that fits your character's Vice, you may have to spend Willpower for the character to resist her base urge.

- **Resist Mind Control:** Mesmerists, mystics and people with mind-warping Z-wave technology may try to take over your character's mind. Resisting such powers may require spending a Willpower point.

## Compulsion

A character who runs out of Willpower can no longer resist the lures and snares of his Nature's Vice. When you're tired, uncertain or frustrated, your bad side is more likely to reveal itself.

## Regaining Willpower

There are several ways to replenish a depleted Willpower pool. Temporary Willpower can never exceed your character's Willpower score. Further, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of when and how your character regains Willpower.

- Acting in accordance with your character's Virtue. (*A character with the Leader Virtue might order his troops to seize a machinegun nest so they can turn it on their enemies. If they succeed, the character gains Willpower because his plan worked. Seizing it on his own wouldn't provide Willpower because he didn't use leadership to get it.*)

- Gain one Willpower point each day after a good night's rest (this does not apply during downtime, see below).

- Gain one Willpower point during downtime (time that's fast-forwarded between meaningful events).

- Your character may receive a point (or more) for accomplishing some particular success. (Perhaps single-handedly capturing a machinegun nest is worth some Willpower after all.)

- Your character get all her points back at the end of a story. This may be modified downward if the series ended on a sour note or if significant plot threads were left unresolved.

## Inspiration

This Trait sets Inspired characters apart from "ordinary" people. A character's Inspiration measures his ability to channel Z-waves, perform super-science or create his own luck. Like Willpower, Inspiration has both a permanent and a temporary value. A character's permanent Inspiration is the number of dice he uses for all Inspiration rolls. His temporary Inspiration pool measures how in tune he currently is with the world around him and how much "weird luck" — or "telluric energy," depending on how your character views his particular talents — he has left. A character's temporary Inspiration pool may exceed his permanent score.

Inspiration has several different functions, some of which may not be accessible to all Inspired characters. Non-Inspired characters have no Inspiration Trait and get none of these advantages.

## Inspiration Facets

Inspired characters exhibit three distinct areas in which they soar above the human norm: spontaneity, contemplation and destruction. These are reflected in the Inspiration Trait's three facets: Intuitive, Reflective and Destructive. Each facet is rated on a scale of one to five points and gives the character a particular set of bonuses in certain situations. The manner in which a character's Inspiration is distributed among the facets also reflects the way in which he is most likely to operate in a crisis. Facets are secondary functions of the primary Inspiration Trait. They do not have temporary pools, only permanent ratings.

During the final stage of character creation, you allocate a number of points equal to the character's permanent Inspiration among the three facets. By definition, a character's total Inspiration facets are always equal to his permanent Inspiration Trait. Every time the character gains a point of permanent Inspiration, you add a point to a facet of your choice. If through some mischance the character loses a point of Inspiration, he also loses a point in his highest facet.

### Intuitive Inspiration

The Intuitive facet measures a character's capacity to subconsciously manipulate fate or consciously make surprising mental leaps. Characters with a high Intuitive facet tend to leap before they look; they're doers, not planners. Such individuals are spontaneous, dynamic and effervescent. A character with one or more dots in his Intuitive facet gains the following advantages:

- **Enhanced Initiative:** Intuitive characters assess situations and react to them significantly faster than other individuals can. An Inspired character gains a permanent bonus to his Initiative score equal to his Intuitive facet rating.

- **Fast Thinker:** An Intuitive character isn't just fast on his feet, he's fast on his wits. You may spend an Inspiration point to add a number of dice equal to the character's Intuitive facet score to the dice pool for any one roll that involves an instant mental reaction. Examples include recovering from surprise in combat, faking the right answer on a radio quiz show, guessing which wire to cut when the bomb's timer has five seconds left, improvising your next line when you've just forgotten your entire script or fast-talking a guard. Inappropriate situations in which you cannot use this advantage include attack rolls in combat, faking the right answer on a two-hour essay test, guessing which wire to cut when the bomb's timer has five hours left, improvising an entire script the night before the show or brainwashing a prisoner.

### Reflective Inspiration

The Reflective facet is a rough measurement of a



character's capacity for superhuman introspection, patience or extended focused effort. Characters with a high Reflective facet are calm, contemplative and reliable, the steady and rational backbones of a group. Reflective Inspiration deals with extended projects and the attainment of long-term goals. A character with one or more dots in his Reflective facet gains the following advantages:

- **I Can Wait:** A highly Reflective character has a superhuman degree of patience. You may add the character's Reflective facet score to the dice pool for any Endurance, Resistance, Willpower or other appropriate roll that involves waiting for something to happen or to end. This includes resisting torture or pain, lying unmoving in ambush for hours on end, riding out the effects of a hallucinogen or maintaining a cool head when everyone else is fleeing in a blind panic.

- **Good Things Come...:** A character who concentrates on his Inspiration's Reflective facet is best suited to extended endeavors. You may spend an Inspiration point to add the character's Reflective facet rating in dice to the dice pool for any one roll that deals with an extended effort. This need not be an extended roll; it may also be a single roll that resolves the success of several hours of intellectual or social work. Examples include negotiating with union organizers, performing an autopsy or developing new super-science.

## Destructive Inspiration

While the Intuitive and Reflective facets relate to *doing* things, the Destructive facet focuses on *undoing* things. Destructive characters aren't necessarily malicious or evil, but they are more inclined to break things down than to build them up. Characters with strong Destructive facets are direct and unsubtle, though they can be remarkably cunning when pursuing their destructive ends. A character with one or more dots in his Destructive facet gains the following advantages:

- **Things Fall Apart:** When the character hits things, they tend to break exceptionally thoroughly. Once per game, you may add the character's Destructive facet score as automatic damage successes on any one attack.

- **The Center Does Not Hold:** Destructive characters are exceptionally adept at destabilizing people and concepts as well as objects. If the character is attempting to destroy a non-physical thing, you may spend an Inspiration point to add the character's Destructive facet rating to any one dice pool related to that task. Examples include wrecking a marriage, destroying a political opponent's professional reputation, overthrowing a small third-world government or disproving a theory of electromagnetism.

## Using Inspiration

You can spend temporary Inspiration on any of the following effects. Unless otherwise noted, you can only spend one Inspiration point a turn. (Note that Inspired villains abide by the very same rules, except that they benefit from performing villainous deeds. Go figure.)

- **Activate Knack:** Many psychic and dynamic Knacks require you to spend an Inspiration point to activate them. This doesn't count toward the one-point-per-turn restriction noted above, although only one Knack may be triggered with Inspiration each turn. See specific Knack descriptions in Chapter Four.

- **Dramatic Editing:** You can spend multiple Inspiration points to assert significant changes to the existing scene. This system is covered in detail in Chapter Six, starting on page 193.

- **Cliffhanger:** Characters in *Adventure* must use their ingenuity to escape certain death every so often, just like the heroes of old adventure serials did in days gone by. A cliffhanger is a specially arranged, climactic use of dramatic editing (see p. 195).

- **Recharge Invention:** Innovative inventions draw upon stored telluric energy to function. A character can be hooked up to a siphoning device that converts the character's raw Inspiration to energy charges the invention can use. See Chapter Five for details.

- **Sheer Heroism:** Once each scene, you can spend an Inspiration point to double your character's dice pool for a single action! This applies only to one task, even if your character performs multiple maneuvers in a turn. This can obviously come in quite handy, but it's a sure-fire way to use up Inspiration points if you're not careful.

- **Intuition:** Luck is always on the hero's side in pulp stories. By spending an Inspiration, you can ask the Storyteller for a useful hint or to point you in the best direction for the story. This isn't character precognition, nor is it just "maybe you don't want your character to open that door." The Storyteller gives you essential information that helps motivate your character to move the story along. She might provide the essential clue needed to discover a murderer's identity, suggest a line of reasoning that reveals the enemy's plan or simply point out that you've been chasing a red herring and that the heart of the story is back at the lab.

## Regaining Inspiration

Inspiration is an extremely useful, yet rare commodity. Each player should be careful about spending it too freely, or he'll find his character out of Inspiration when he needs it most! Conversely, one of the best ways to gain more Inspiration is by wisely spending the points you already have. "Wisely" is the key! Spending an Inspiration point on an exciting maneuver that adds to the game and furthers the story is a good way to get a return on your investment; blowing an Inspiration point every time your character attacks two-bit thugs is a good way to waste Inspiration.

A character begins every story (but not every game session) with his temporary Inspiration pool topped off (equal to his permanent Inspiration). A character may end a story with a temporary pool higher than his permanent score. Although there's nothing wrong with that, per se, the Storyteller may not be making the story dramatic



enough. **Adventure** is a game of high excitement and amazing action, after all!

The ways a character may regain Inspiration are described below. As stated previously, a character's Inspiration pool may exceed his permanent Inspiration rating. (As with spending Inspiration, Inspired villains follow the same essential rules described here, regaining Inspiration for performing villainous acts instead of heroic efforts. It's only fair, right?)

- **Work Hard, Play Hard:** An Inspired character regains one point of temporary Inspiration by spending two consecutive days on rest and leisure activities. If the character is under enforced rest, such as a hospital stay or an ocean voyage, but can't indulge in his preferred recreation, regaining each Inspiration point takes five days. The character's relaxation must be appropriate to his established personality, preferences and habits. A millionaire playboy regains Inspiration by partying with all his energy, but an ascetic priest regains Inspiration through meditation and reading scriptures. This method may be used only to recover Inspiration points up to the character's permanent score.

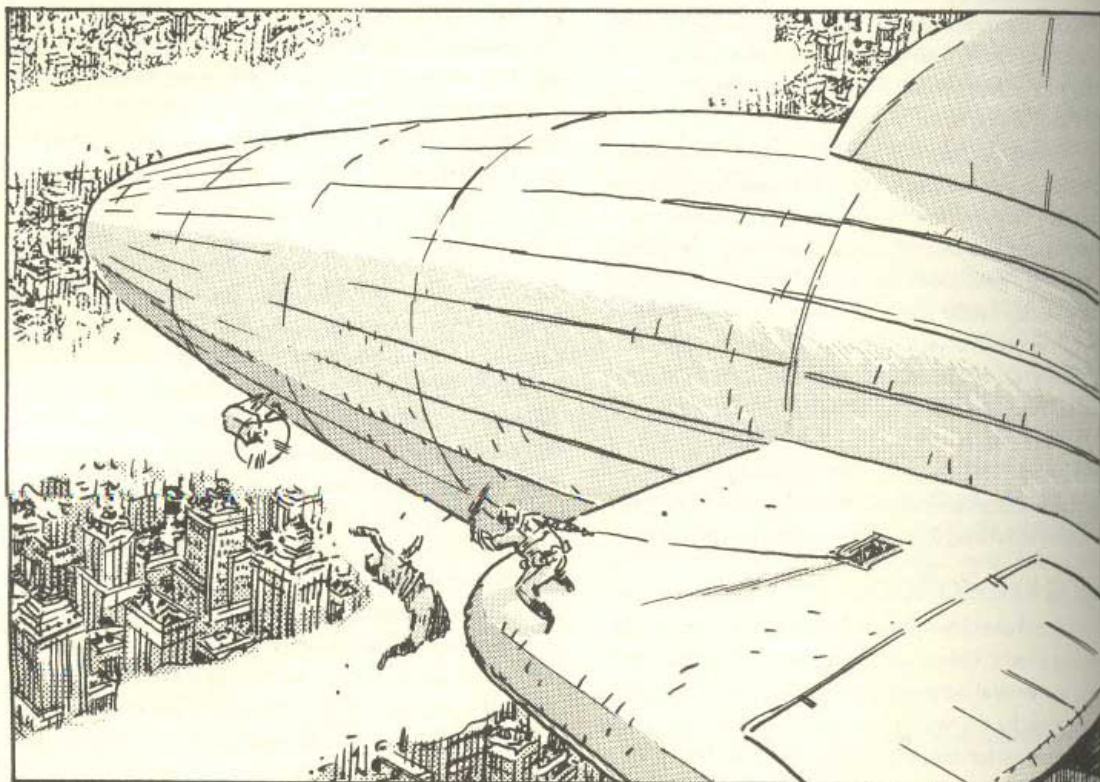
- **Wild Success:** If you roll at least five extra successes beyond an action's difficulty but gain no benefit from such an amazing result — say getting an incredible result when picking a lock, seducing someone, coming up with a lie — the character receives a point of Inspiration. This does not apply to combat situations, super-science R&D, Knack use or Sheer Heroism (see above).

- **Inner Peace:** Inspiration isn't necessarily tied to Willpower, but the two are related in the sense that both of them reflect parts of the character's fundamental na-

ture. If the character would regain a Willpower point but already has his maximum amount of temporary Willpower, he acquires an Inspiration point instead.

- **Heroic Entertainment:** When it comes down to it, **Adventure** is a game. As such, it's meant to be entertaining. Accordingly, if the player spends Inspiration for an action that is appropriately heroic for the character and benefits someone besides the character himself — anything from dramatic editing to activating a Knack — the character does not lose any of the Inspiration spent and even gains a single additional point! This may not happen more than once per game session for any given character. The Storyteller should maintain a reasonably stringent definition of "appropriately heroic" and may deny the benefit if a player has clearly calculated his character's efforts solely to scrounge up more Inspiration.

- **Inspiring Acts:** This is similar to Heroic Entertainment, but specifically does *not* involve spending Inspiration. Instead, the Storyteller may reward the character with one point of Inspiration if she feels the character did something that was especially appropriate to the character's primary Inspiration facet — a highly entertaining bit of social interaction with a rival, an amazing piece of un-Inspired athletics or something similar. A character should get this prize no more than once per game session and should not be rewarded for the same kind of action from one game to the next. (This prevents the player from trying the same routine over and over to scrounge points rather than to make the story richer.) As with Heroic Entertainment, the Storyteller decides what deserves this benefit and should be fair and consistent in handing it out.





# CHAPTER

## KNACKS

# FOUR

Many adventurers have preternatural advantages over their mundane counterparts. These are often minor circumstantial talents, impossible to quantify or even to identify as anything but luck. Yet, some adventurers display arcane knowledge or physical mutations so powerful or bizarre as to make them objects of study in their own right. Adventurers commonly refer to such amazing capabilities as "Knacks."

Like a character's other Traits — from her skills to her allegiance to her Inspiration — Knacks are simply another component of who she is. They are not meant to replace cleverness and ingenuity, but to accentuate them when appropriate. So, while Knacks can come in handy, a character should not rely overmuch on them to get her out of tight spots. It's worth noting that some Inspired have no Knacks at all (see Chapter Eight for examples).

For game purposes, Knacks are divided into three categories: *heroic*, *psychic* and *dynamic*. Knacks are only available to Inspired characters — mere mortals cannot hope to attain such gifts. An Inspired character's access to Knacks is based on the path to heroism (or villainy...) that she has chosen: Daredevils may purchase heroic Knacks, mesmerists can develop psychic Knacks, and stalwarts gain dynamic Knacks.

All Knacks run on Inspiration. Heroic Knacks simply require that the character be Inspired, while many psychic and dynamic Knacks cost Inspiration to use. Use of most Knacks requires a roll; if this is the case, the Knack's individual rules describe the mechanics for that roll.

See page 122 for Knack costs at character creation and page 125 for costs during gameplay.

### Manifesting Knacks

The same Knack can manifest in many different ways, depending on how an individual character sees herself. As far as the rules are concerned, a sorcerer who calls on the power of D'eedre and flings bolts of screaming green flame from her hands is doing the same thing as a highly disciplined physicist who ignites flammable materials by exciting their molecules via the exertion of his own will. They're both using the psychic Knack called Flame Conjunction. In fact, as far as the science of telluric energy is concerned, the two effects register virtually identically — both give the same readings on a Z-wave image resonator. Still, to outside observers, each individual creates a wildly different effect. When describing a character's Knacks, remem-

ber that there are many paths to the same result. Pick one that fits the character's unique style.

## Heroic Knacks

These talents are the subtlest of the three types of Inspired powers, for their effects are neither obvious nor quantifiable. Instead, they take the form of incredible displays of skill or uncanny coincidences. Heroic Knacks don't even require an Inspiration expenditure to use. They are narrowly focused, usually applicable only in one given situation — but in that situation, the character is a world-class specialist who even mesmerists and stalwarts may not rival. They might more appropriately be considered brief instances of dramatic editing (as described on p. 193).

Almost all heroic Knacks require certain Trait minimums to purchase. They're specialized effects, after all, that center on one particular feat or situation. It doesn't make much sense for a 98-pound weakling to have Fists of Stone, nor should a stammering nincompoop be a Master of Dissimulation. If the character's score in a prerequisite ever falls below the minimum (whether as a result of age, injury, disease or the effects of other Knacks), the character loses that Knack's benefits until she can raise the affected Trait back to its minimum level.

Daredevils are the only Inspired who may use heroic Knacks. Each heroic Knack costs two transformation points if bought during character creation or 10 experience points if purchased during the course of play.

## Narrating Heroic Knacks

The single most important point to remember when heroic Knacks come into play is that they are *not* superpowers. They aren't powers at all, actually — daredevils, by definition, don't manipulate Z-waves. They're ordinary men and women who have special edges that make them heroes. Heroic Knacks are those edges, expressions of sheer courage and dauntlessness that set heroes apart from the masses.

Accordingly, heroic Knacks require a bit of delicate handling during the course of play. Unlike the flashier psychic and dynamic Knacks, heroic Knacks rarely have any outwardly visible signs. Their manifestations are coincidental — the average individual, upon observing the effects of a heroic Knack, will *always* write it off as "that's just the way he is," "that's just his luck" or "he's just that good." For instance, no one's ever attributed James



Bond's superhuman calm to psychic powers — it's an accepted part of who and what the character is. Heroic Knacks should receive similar treatment. Remember, the characters are *heroes* (or, at a bare minimum, antiheroes), and heroes always stand out.

## Complete Privacy

*"The deal's set. We'll meet at—"* Vrooom! Honk! Honk! *"—night. See you then."*

No one's ever caught you talking about something you shouldn't be discussing. No matter how hard someone tries to listen, there's always a convenient string quartet or a loud delivery truck nearby. Your hair or hat always seems to block the line of sight over your shoulder, or your hand conveniently shields your notepad. You've never been caught in a bedroom you shouldn't be in, and the coppers have the devil's own time following you in traffic. This Knack is particularly subtle, as it doesn't do anything to affect your own actions. Rather, it interferes with other people's attempts to listen in on your conversations or pry into your writing. It's nearly impossible to monitor you without being blatantly obvious.

**System:** All attempts to eavesdrop on the character, read her lips, tap her phone line, read over her shoulder or otherwise subtly monitor her personal actions automatically fail without the use of an Inspired power. Attempts to shadow or tail her are at +2 difficulty. This Knack provides no defense against obvious, direct scrutiny, such as a news camera, nor does it keep people from breaking into her hotel room and searching her luggage. It's only good against covert attempts at invading her privacy — listeners who don't want to be seen listening and the like.

**Prerequisite:** The character must have at least two dots in each of the Stealth and Subterfuge Abilities or have Cipher 3 to gain this degree of secretiveness.

## Death Defiance

*"But... but... I saw you die!"*

Your cohorts have seen your plane explode in midair. They've heard your screams as you've toppled off a 20-story building. They've watched you fall in the spray of a score of Tommy guns. Yet, no matter how many times you've faced certain death, you've resurfaced — rent, bent, but very much alive.

**System:** When using dramatic editing, the character's player may spend Willpower points in addition to or instead of Inspiration in any situation that will likely result in the character's death. The only limitation is that the character is apparently dead for at least one scene — perhaps his friends see his car shoot off a cliff, only to find him hours later, sooty but alive. Perhaps they watch him drown, only to learn that he washed ashore on the Phantom Isle and is still breathing (for the moment, anyway).

**Prerequisite:** The character must have a minimum Willpower of 8. Defying death takes grit.

## Dramatic Entrance

*"Whoa; get a load of her!"*

You've just got *it*. You may not know quite what it





is, but everyone else sure does! Whether it's your stunning features, your gleaming smile, your distinctive mode of dress or your aura of palpable menace, *something* makes people stop and take notice of you when they first see you. This reaction isn't a sustained one — the novelty of your presence soon wears off — but if you're clever, you can milk it for quite a bit while you've got your new acquaintances sandbagged.

**System:** The player gains three bonus dice on all Social rolls against any given individual during the entire scene of their first meeting (in person only — radio appearances and photographs don't count). This Knack has no effect during subsequent encounters — only during the initial acquaintanceship (one hour maximum). Any botches on a roll dealing with a first impression or a dramatic entrance count as ordinary failures.

On the downside, the character is at +1 difficulty at any attempt to remain inconspicuous in any situation where more than half the observers haven't seen her before. This includes most crowd scenes.

**Prerequisite:** No daredevil with lower than Appearance 3 can have a Dramatic Entrance. You've got to have some raw material to work with.

## Eagle Eyes

*"You see that, about three kilometers past that rock with the nick out of the top? Oh, never mind."*

Whenever you're traveling, you constantly irritate your companions pointing out things they can't see. Your eyesight is second to none. This uncanny visual acuity even allows you some degree of perception in weather conditions that leave most people blind to anything more than five feet in front of them.

**System:** The character gains two additional dice on all rolls related to long-range or precise visual perception. All difficulty penalties imposed on any vision-related roll by poor visibility (darkness, fog, smoke) are reduced by two. All difficulty penalties for long-range attacks with ranged weapons are halved, rounding down.

**Prerequisite:** The blind cannot lead the blind; a character must have Perception 3 or better to have Eagle Eyes.

## Enhanced Impact

*Wha-pow! CRASH!*

Just like in the pulps, your attacks drive your victims staggering back several meters in pain and shock. This can be a tactical advantage by opening the range between you and a closing opponent or a fatal attack in its own right if you can strike at the proper angle to drive your enemy into something harmful. However you use it, it sure looks impressive.

**System:** A character may purchase this Knack separately for each of the following Abilities: Archery, Brawl, Firearms, Martial Arts and Melee. When the daredevil makes a successful attack against another character while using an Ability for which she has Enhanced Impact, the victim is hurled one meter in the direction of the attack

for every health level of damage the daredevil inflicts. This impact does no additional damage, though it can propel the target into a hazardous or fatal situation (through a campfire, off a cliff, into a vat of acid). An Inspired target may spend a point of Inspiration to negate the effects of this feat on him for the scene.

**Prerequisite:** In each Ability for which a character has Enhanced Impact, she must have a minimum score of three dots.

## Fists of Stone

*"Brass knuckles? Who needs 'em?"*

Your gnarled, knobby hams have probably seen more than their fair share of other folks' jawbones. You've got a grip like a vise, and you tend to leave dents when you knock on doors. Why bother with tricks such as a roll of quarters or brass knuckles? Your collection of scars and calluses works just fine for you.

**System:** The character's bare-handed attacks inflict a base (Strength + 3) dice of bashing damage. His Might dice pool is considered two points higher for any roll dealing solely with the power of his grip. His hands never suffer minor mishaps (scraped knuckles, sprained wrists), though they're not all that pretty, and he probably doesn't play piano. Finally, he receives no damage from punching anything less sturdy than solid metal.

**Prerequisite:** A daredevil must have Strength 3 or better to have Fists of Stone.

## Forgettable

*"Who was that guy?"*

It's not that you don't make a good impression, just that no one ever seems to remember it once you're gone. They may be able to recall everything you did or said with perfect clarity, but your name, your face and the sound of your voice consistently escape memory. Even photographs of you tend to be blurry or faded. This Knack is invaluable if you don't want your actions to come back to haunt you, but it also makes it hard to get a second date.

**System:** The character is just what this Knack's name implies: forgettable. The Knack has few mechanical benefits, but the Storyteller should strive to ensure that only the character's most extreme impressions have any lasting effect on witnesses' memories. Note that this does *not* apply to the current scene the character is in. The character suffers no penalty to Social rolls involving direct interaction. Only after he leaves the immediate area do people begin to forget her.

While the daredevil's closest associates and family members aren't likely to forget him, pretty much everyone else will. Any casual acquaintance or witness attempting to recall the character's name or face after he's left the immediate scene must succeed in a cross-matched (Intelligence + Awareness) roll with a difficulty penalty determined by the character's Intuitive Inspiration facet (see chart). Photographers suffer equal penalties when trying to capture clear images of the subject.



| Intuitive facet | Penalty |
|-----------------|---------|
| 0-1             | +1      |
| 2-3             | +2      |
| 4               | +3      |
| 5               | +4      |

**Prerequisite:** A character may have no dots in the Reputation Background and be Forgettable. This restriction is permanent. If the character somehow finds herself in a situation where he might otherwise gain a reputation, the Storyteller should allow the player to trade the unusable dots for Allies, Contacts or Resources on a one-for-one basis. This represents specific people, rather than the general public, remembering him.

## Gadgeteer

*"Hey, hand me that whatchamacallit and get ready to push the button on the doohickey when I give you the go-ahead!"*

You have no problem using even the most complex devices. Intuition and a good deal of mechanical sense give you the uncanny ability to operate any piece of machinery you encounter. You may not always know exactly what you're messing with, but you know how to make it do... well, whatever it's supposed to do.

Plus, you're no slouch when it comes to making improvements to standard technology. Coming up with technological breakthroughs is as easy as falling off a log — and given a couple minutes you could figure out a way to improve on *that*, too.

**System:** The character can operate any relatively simple device (five or fewer controls) within seconds of seeing it. Complex machinery requires a few minutes of inspection. Gadgeteer does not grant familiarity with the principles behind the device, just an operator's familiarity with the controls and settings. Any additional Ability requirements required to operate the device still apply, but otherwise the character faces no difficulties from unskilled operation. An ordinary biplane pilot would be lost on the flight deck of Doctor Zorbo's *Behemoth*-class air-dreadnought, but a Gadgeteer can use her Pilot dice pool (or default to Wits) normally.

If the character has Ability mastery in Engineering, Medicine or Science, as appropriate, this Knack adds her Intuitive facet in bonus dice to related research and development rolls for designing inventions (see p. 177). The bonus applies even if the character is only a research assistant. You must purchase the Knack separately for each relevant Ability mastery.

**Prerequisites:** The character must have three or more dots in Intelligence and Wits and a minimum Inspiration 3.

## Indomitable Will

*"Mesmerism? Hypnosis? Telepathic mind-control powers from the Hollow Earth? Ha!"*

You laugh at feeble attempts to invade your mind as if they were but the wheedling of children. Indeed, you may even be completely unaware of the effects of such power should they be used upon you. Whether you're incredibly disciplined or simply thick-skulled, most paranormal at-





tempts to influence your mind fail — and even those of considerable strength meet significant resistance.

**System:** All mundane attempts to hypnotize or brainwash the character require three times as long and three times as many successes as normal. Any Knacks that directly invade the mind, whether for the purposes of probing, communication, alteration or outright attack, operate at +2 difficulty. Indomitable Will does not affect Knacks that create illusions affecting the character's *perceptions*, only those which actually touch her thought processes.

Unfortunately, the daredevil cannot turn off this Knack. Telepathic contact from friendly minds meets with this resistance just like an unwelcome invasion does. Also, a character with Indomitable Will provides no benefit to a mesmerist with the Scientific Prodigy Knack (see p. 164).

**Prerequisite:** The faint of heart are easily swayed. Only a daredevil of the sturdiest mental constitution (Willpower 8+) may have Indomitable Will.

## Instant Expert

*"I saw a guy do this once in Brisbane...."*

You have the uncanny ability to recall any single feat you've seen performed — once. This Knack doesn't allow you to repeat the deed with any degree of consistency, but it may allow you to reach for an Inspired level of performance in a field you normally know nothing about, at a moment when nothing less than the world's best effort will suffice.

**System:** The player spends a Willpower point. For one physical task (though it may be a lengthy physical action, such as surgery), the character gains a number of dots equal to her Intuitive facet in a single Ability in which she possesses zero dots. This Knack may only produce this effect for any given Ability once per game session.

**Prerequisite:** The character must have at least three dots in Wits in order to be an Instant Expert.

## Jack of All Tongues

*"It just so happens that I learned this obscure dialect of Farsi during my last year in university — right after completing an independent study in Cantonese."*

You're a refugee from the Tower of Babel, or so it would seem to anyone who speaks to you. While other students were struggling with one foreign tongue, you were struggling with your school's limited selection of language courses. Some professors consider you a freak of nature, while others just want to drag you along on their next Congo expedition.

**System:** The character knows double the normal number of languages for her Linguistics score and pays half the normal experience cost to learn new languages. When speaking, she displays no foreign accent — her pronunciation and idioms are perfect for the local culture. If the character has no dots in Linguistics, she knows two extra languages. At the Storyteller's discretion, the character may decipher a completely new language or script with a Linguistics roll at +2 difficulty — no translator needed.

**Prerequisite:** The character must have at least three dots in Intelligence to be a Jack of All Tongues.

## Lie Detector

*"You think I'm going to fall for that line? Try again, pal, and this time don't bother trying to put one over on me."*

People simply can't lie to you. You may have a way of looking at them that makes untruths freeze in their mouths, or your ears might burn whenever you hear a lie. However this Knack works for you, it's nigh-impossible to pull a fast one on you — unless the liar's another Inspired individual....

**System:** Non-Inspired characters suffer +2 difficulty to Subterfuge attempts when trying to lie to the daredevil. If the liar has two or fewer dots in his Subterfuge Ability, he simply cannot fool the character. While the daredevil may sense that a lie was just told, this Knack does not automatically reveal the truth to her.

Inspired characters with dots in Subterfuge who try lying to the daredevil may ignore this difficulty. Inspired characters with no dots in Subterfuge are treated like normal characters.

**Prerequisite:** In order to detect lies to this degree, a daredevil must have a certain sensory acuity (Perception 3 or better).

## Lightning Reflexes

*"Faster than a striking snake? Yeah, maybe I heard that a time or two before."*

Your reaction times are far faster than the human norm, and you rarely, if ever, falter. While you're not capable of the bursts of blinding swiftness that some stalwarts display, your reflexes nonetheless operate at a steadily higher level than do those of most people. You habitually snatch insects out of the air, and ambushes never catch you flat-footed.

**System:** Whenever the die for the character's initiative roll comes up a 1, 2, or 3, it counts as a 4.

**Prerequisite:** Lightning Reflexes require a certain degree of physical acuity (Dexterity 4 or better) or a corresponding degree of mental fleetness (Wits 4 or better). The character gains no additional benefit for fulfilling both prerequisites.

## Master of Dissimulation

*"Snake-oil salesman"? How crude. I prefer 'confidence man.'"*

No one is more confident than you are, buddy. Your binding webs of double-talk and immense vocabulary bamboozle even the most astute listener. As long as there's no one present who can call you on your bluffs, you can fake nearly any sort of professional credentials. Just don't try to act on your professed knowledge — you may talk the talk, but you most likely can't walk the walk.

**System:** With a successful Subterfuge roll at standard difficulty, the character becomes an instant authority on anything — as far as observers are concerned. She could claim to be a detective and gain admission to a crime scene by mumbling under her breath about the preservation of evidence or could infiltrate a hospital by



masquerading as a doctor called in to consult on the dreaded Bennett-Mullins Syndrome. As long as her deception remains within the realm of verbal misdirection, only those observers whose Perception Attribute ratings exceed the daredevil's successes on the Subterfuge roll *and* who are experts in the field that she is discussing can tell that she's not what she appears.

The character's duplicity is revealed if she attempts to act on her purported knowledge. She could infiltrate a hospital by spouting pseudo-medical gibberish, and even most of the doctors there would accept her, but she would quickly be revealed as a fraud if she tried to perform surgery. Of course, if the character actually *does* have the Abilities required for her roll, there's no reason she can't back up her bluff!

The thing that separates a Master of Dissimulation from an ordinary scam artist is her complete independence from physical guises ("I left my badge on my dresser, Johnnie..."). This Knack functions regardless of the character's appearance. Even if she's just crawled out of the sewers, a straight posture and an arrogant tilt of the chin will convince just about anyone that she's a high-class lawyer who was simply performing some "field investigation."

**Prerequisite:** It's not easy being this smooth. A daredevil must possess an ample measure of both improvisational skill (Wits 3+) *and* personal magnetism (Manipulation 3+) to be a Master of Dissimulation.

## Navigation Hazard

*"Try and cut me off, will ya? Whoops! Who'da thought a Bentley would flip just from hittin' a pothole?"*

You're not prone to accidents yourself, but it seems that every driver around you is. These accidents are confined to minor fender-benders (which never seem to impede *your* travels) in normal traffic, but true catastrophes result whenever you're involved in high-speed maneuvers. Pursuing vehicles are flung end-over-end by minor brushes with lampposts, and subjects you're trying to catch are hard-pressed to dodge the myriad pedestrians, wagons and cattle in their paths.

**System:** This Knack functions any time the character is in a race, chase or combat in which she is *not* on her own two feet. The form of transportation doesn't matter — the daredevil could be driving a car, flying a biplane, piloting a motorboat, pushing a scooter, riding a camel or clinging to the back of a pterosaur. The character must be steering the transportation herself for the Knack to function.

If an opposing vehicle (or mount) receives collision damage or suffers a mishap (the driver fails a control roll) during the conflict, it loses an additional number of structural levels equal to the daredevil's Destructive facet (for mounts, the damage applies as automatic bashing health levels). This bonus also applies as a bashing damage effect to any people in the target vehicle (or on the target mount). This damage effect adds to any other bashing damage passengers might already suffer from the collision and may be resisted with soak normally.

A vehicle destroyed by this extra damage explodes in flames if even the slightest quantity of flammable material is on board. Passengers may roll Athletics at +2 difficulty or spend an Inspiration point to leap clear before the fire consumes them. This Knack does not apply when a vehicle or mount takes damage from a weapon, unless it physically collided with the weapon in question. Cannon shells are not collision hazards in the usual sense.

**Prerequisite:** The character must have at least three dots in one transportation-related Ability (Animal Handling, Drive or Pilot) and at least one dot in Destructive Inspiration.

## One-Man Army

*"Three against one? That ain't fair. Why don't you find some more friends first?"*

You're never outnumbered — you just have larger and larger target selections. The more enemies you're facing, the happier you are. In fact, you prefer situations where you're being assaulted by more than just a couple of opponents. If there's one of you and five of them, chances are good that they'll wind up doing some of the work for you!

**System:** The character receives none of the usual penalties for facing multiple opponents in close combat. Instead, she receives one bonus die on all close combat maneuver rolls for every opponent past the first that she faces, to a maximum of +4 dice. In addition to this bonus, each turn the daredevil faces four or more opponents directly in close combat she gains one *additional* action (see p. 201). This extra action can only be used for close-combat maneuvers and occurs at half the character's current Initiative score. Remember to adjust the total bonuses as the number of opponents change.

**Example:** Kai Lee faces four of Boss Vandegrift's goons; three are intent on pounding him into a pulp with brass knuckles, while the fourth pulls a knife. Kai Lee decides to make an all-out attack on the knife-wielding goon with his normal action and split his additional action to punch each of the other three goons. The first action gains three bonus dice from his three extra opponents. The penalty for splitting an action three ways normally reduces the dice pool for his first punch by three dice, the second by four, and the third by five. Kai Lee has three bonus dice for this also, so his net penalties are only 0, -1 and -2.

Kai Lee drops the knife-wielding mobster, leaving only three the next turn. He's down to two extra opponents so he has only one action and two bonus dice. He decides that the best defense is still a good offense and elects to punch each of them once. His multiple attack is split three ways for standard penalties of -3, -4 and -5, which the bonus dice reduce to -1, -2 and -3.

**Prerequisite:** The character must have at least three dots in one close combat Ability (Brawl, Martial Arts or Melee).

## Perfect Poise

*"I don't mean to be rude, old boy, but I have an appointment at three. Is your maniacal ranting about this lovely death trap of yours leading somewhere?"*



They never see you sweat. You're capable of remaining unruffled even in the tightest of situations. If you gamble, even the most savvy of opponents remarks on your poker face. You never panic at the threat of violence, nor in the face of the most excruciating insults. You are the very epitome of "suave and debonair," never less than completely composed and in control of yourself. Note that you aren't necessarily immune to surprise — you can be ambushed just as easily as the next person. You're simply better able to control your reactions than most ordinary folks.

**System:** The character is completely immune to panic unless it's induced by other Inspired powers. She is completely incapable of displaying any sign of discomfort, shock or surprise unless she chooses to. The daredevil gains two bonus dice in staredowns (see p. 192) and all Social rolls involving poise, grace or composure (Storyteller's discretion). She also receives one additional die in any gambling situation where a "poker face" is a factor.

As a side effect of this Knack, the character is immune to minor embarrassing mishaps such as tripping, spilling her drink or getting splashed by a passing car. Also, her clothes almost never suffer damage or get significantly dirty outside of combat. If they do become rumpled or soiled, a brief brushing-off usually restores them to near-pristine condition.

**Prerequisite:** This Knack requires a high degree of self-control or an exceptionally agile mind. The daredevil must have a minimum Willpower 7 or a minimum Wits 3.

## Resilient

*"Who needs hospitals? Just give me a couple of raw steaks and a big glass of orange juice, and I'll be fine."*

You're up and around while the doctors are still trying to decide how to break the news of your crippling injuries to your next of kin. You're not any less likely to be critically injured, but you bounce back from even the gravest wounds or illnesses in a matter of days — as long as you survive them.

**System:** The character heals all wounds as if they were one wound level less serious on the recovery chart. This bonus applies if she is already enjoying improved recovery times due to skilled medical care — effectively healing at two levels better on the chart. Additionally, the daredevil halves the minimum healing time for the Bruised health level.

**Prerequisite:** Rapid healing requires a certain degree of physical hardiness. A Resilient character must have a minimum of Stamina 3.

## Steely Gaze

*"You really want to cross me? You look dumb, but I didn't think you were that dumb."*

It's said that the eyes are the windows to the soul. This may well be true in your case, for one glimpse of your blazing orbs convinces even the most hardened observer of your inner steel. Very few men can stand nose-to-nose with you and not back down. Your cobra-like stare can even pin particularly weak-willed individuals in place as if they were particularly appetizing field mice.

**System:** The character automatically wins all staredowns (see p. 192) against non-Inspired characters and gains two bonus dice against Inspired opponents. The daredevil may also temporarily stun a non-Inspired target with the sheer force of personality that his gaze contains. To do this, the character makes eye contact with the intended target (who must have a Willpower score lower than or equal to the daredevil's Charisma rating). The player rolls Intimidation at +1 difficulty. Success forces the subject to lose her next combat action (if in combat) or automatically fail her next opposed Social roll (if out of combat). A character may use this Knack against any one individual no more than twice per day.

**Prerequisite:** A daredevil must have a Charisma 3 or higher in order to possess a Steely Gaze.

## Trick Shot

*"William Tell? A piker! I could've had that apple sliced and peeled before it hit the ground!"*

While your usual marksmanship is nothing to sneer at, you truly shine when attempting the impossible. The more difficult the conditions under which you're shooting, the more skilled you become.

**System:** The character purchases this Knack separately for firearms, bows or thrown weapons. When performing a tricky maneuver while using a weapon for which she has Trick Shot, the character's difficulty penalties are halved (round down) for called shots, target size, high winds, target movement, character movement, unsure footing or virtually anything else except wound penalties or poor visibility. In addition, the character gains a number of bonus dice equal to the original difficulty penalties that were imposed! She may not gain more bonus dice through this Knack than she has dots in the Ability she is using to make the attack.

Any extra successes that result from the Trick Shot are halved (round down) before applying them to the attack's damage effect. This reduction reflects the fact that the Knack's focus is on performing amazing shots.

**Example:** Annabelle Lee Newfield stands on the pitching deck of a ship in high seas as the SPAD comes in on a strafing run. She's been shot once and suffers a -1 die wound penalty. She can't see the pilot, so Annabelle aims for the propeller. The pitching deck applies +2 difficulty, a called shot to the propeller adds another +2 difficulty, and the Storyteller feels the plane's moving fast enough that it's worth another +2 difficulty to hit. Trick Shot halves this to a mere +3 difficulty and adds six dice (equal to the initial difficulty) to her attack roll! Her final attack dice pool loses one die thanks to her wound penalty, however. Her player gets seven successes; after subtracting for the four successes needed to hit, she rounds the three remaining extra successes down to one and adds that to her pistol's damage effect.

**Prerequisite:** The character must have a minimum Firearms 3 to purchase this Knack for firearms, Archery



3 for bows, and Athletics 3 for thrown weapons. At the Storyteller's discretion, this Knack may also apply to close-combat attacks (requiring Melee 3 or higher).

## Universally Deadly

*"No, I've never used a Chinese throwing star before...." swwwTHUNK! "Doesn't seem to difficult, though."*

In your hands, any weapon is extremely deadly. You may never have seen a given weapon before, but you intuitively understand how to use it as soon as it's in your hand. You're more a prodigy than a savant — your talents are the product of precise aim and an intuitive understanding of range, weight and speed.

**System:** The character gains one die to attack rolls with all weapons and reduces by one all wound penalties involving weapon use. The character is never penalized for using unfamiliar or exotic weapons.

**Prerequisite:** The character must have at least four dots of Firearms and Melee to take this Knack.

## Untouchable

*"That the best you can do?"*

Through a combination of indomitable courage, swift reflexes and uncanny luck, you can face down gun-wielding maniacs with only your bare hands and have a better chance of surviving — and even winning — the fight than your gun-toting companions.

**System:** Whenever the character is in combat and is *not* armed with a firearm, all attacks made on him with ranged weapons suffer a difficulty penalty dependent on his Destructive facet, as determined by the following table. This only applies if he began the combat without a firearm on his person — no fair throwing down that Tommy gun once the fight starts in order to gain these benefits!

| Destructive facet | Penalty |
|-------------------|---------|
| 0-1               | +1      |
| 2-3               | +2      |
| 4                 | +3      |
| 5                 | +4      |

**Prerequisite:** The character must be capable of a certain degree of rapid evasion in order to be "Untouchable": An Athletics or Martial Arts Ability score of 3 or better, as well as Dexterity 3 or better, is required.

## Wheelman (et al)

*"Whew! That was close! Don't worry, we don't need all four wheels to get away from these amateurs."*

You were driving to the corner store before you could walk, or you were born with a stick in one hand and a throttle in the other, or you can guide a mount like its a part of you. Whether you're a speed demon, a knight of the skies, a renowned skipper or a master horseman, you are virtually unassailable in any vehicle or on any mount that navigates your chosen medium. You can overcome any damage to the craft or mount short of its total destruction, assuming anyone can hit you at all. Even in the *direst of circumstances, you can keep moving as long as*

your conveyance is capable of motion — stories about regarding fatally injured daredevils who defied death itself to finish one last journey.

**System:** This Knack may be purchased for four different areas, though all use the same rules. A Wheelman is a natural at controlling all land-based vehicles; a Barnstormer is her airborne counterpart; a Sea Dog is a nautically inclined daredevil; a Trick Rider shares a similar relationship with living mounts.

Whenever the character is controlling a vehicle to which the Knack applies, its top speed increases by 10 percent for each dot of Intuitive Inspiration she has (a living mount increases by 20 percent). The character's Intuitive facet also adds to the vehicle or mount's total Maneuver score, giving the daredevil a potentially large dice pool to perform amazing stunts.

While the vehicle or mount is moving, all attacks against it *that the daredevil is aware of* have their difficulty raised by half of the daredevil's Wits rating (round down). Once the vehicle or mount is hit, the daredevil takes no dice pool penalties for damage to it, short of its total destruction. If she herself is in control and receives injuries that drop her below the Crippled health level (including those that would otherwise kill her instantly), the character continues to function as if she were only Crippled until the vehicle or mount is destroyed or stops moving.

**Prerequisite:** This Knack must be purchased separately for each relevant Ability, in which the character must have three or more dots (Animal Handling for Trick Rider, Drive for Wheelman, Pilot with an aircraft specialty for Barnstormer, Pilot with a watercraft specialty for Sea Dog).

## Psychic Knacks

Psychic Knacks are the domain of those Inspired individuals commonly known as mesmerists. These paranormal powers are applications of focused will and lie mainly within the realm of the mental. However, some mesmerists are also capable of truly spectacular physical manifestations, whether altering their own bodies' capabilities or affecting the world around them. Mesmerists register as etherically active on a Z-wave image resonator, and some methods of divination can detect them as well (though there's some debate as to whether accurate divinatory talents are another psychic manifestation or something entirely different).

## Psychic Knack Descriptions

Theoreticians generally place psychic powers in one of three categories, determined by the extent of the power's measurable effects on the physical world or the mental equilibrium of test subjects. *Level one* psychic Knacks are usually sensory in nature or have no discernable capacity to inflict physical injury or psychological trauma on a healthy adult human. *Level two* Knacks have measurable physical manifestations (temperature, pressure and so forth) or can



affect a subject's mental processes enough for a psychiatrist to record a measurable behavioral change. *Level three* Knacks generally have the potential to cause lethal injury or permanent psychological changes.

These three classes are general rules of thumb, not ironclad rules. Some potentially lethal physical powers have limiting factors that place them in level two due to reduced danger, and exceptionally strong sensory abilities may be rated as level two or even level three due to their range, scope or invasive nature. In short, the three classes are a mechanic for game balance that also has a convenient reflection in the world of *Adventure*.

If purchased during character creation, a psychic Knack costs a number of transformation points equal to its class. If purchased with experience expenditure, a level one psychic Knack costs 8 experience points, a level two costs 12 points, and a level three is 16 points. These powers are not hierarchical; a character does not have to buy a level one Knack before purchasing a level two power.

## Level One Psychic Knacks

### Brain Skimming

*"Dissembling doesn't become you, madam. I can read you like an open book."*

You have some basic telepathic aptitude — perhaps just enough to get yourself in trouble. While you can't insert false images or memories into your subjects' minds, you can read their surface thoughts, the almost-verbalized truths that bubble up from the depths of consciousness. This isn't always an exact science, as your readings are often colored by your own expectations or by the differences in the ways you and your subject perceive the world. Still, it's accurate enough that you can tell truth from lies or find out the answer to a question that your subject is actively trying to avoid. This Knack doesn't usually implant knowledge directly into your mind unless you see your abilities as that cut and dried. You may see the truth you seek in a fleeting vision, hear a ghostly whisper in your ear or taste your subject's lie on the back of your tongue.

**System:** The mesmerist must engage the subject in conversation, and the discussion must at least tangentially touch on the subject about which the character wants to know. The player specifies the information for which she wants to dredge and rolls Rapport. If the subject is aware that the character is trying to get something specific out of him (Storyteller's discretion or a contested Subterfuge roll), he may try to resist the effort by thinking of other things (nursery rhymes, snatches of popular song, vulgarities directed at the mesmerist). The mesmerist's attempt then becomes a resisted action against the subject's player, who rolls Willpower. Any successes the defender gets subtracts from the character's ability to penetrate his mind.

The degree of success required depends on how closely held the information is. If it's something that the

subject has no particular feelings about or actively wants to reveal but can't, one success is enough. If it's something the subject wants to avoid discussing but isn't particularly afraid of saying, two successes will retrieve it. Emotionally sensitive topics or oath-bound secrets require three successes. Things that the character actively fears revealing require four successes. If the secret will get the subject killed or ruin his life if it comes out, the player needs five successes, and the mesmerist had best be prepared to guard his newfound knowledge carefully. Failure reveals nothing useful, while a botch may give the mesmerist incorrect or contradictory details.

This Knack requires some degree of successful communication between the participants. Also, if the target knows nothing about what the mesmerist is digging for, no amount of successes will offer up useful information.

### Command Voice

*"Since I'm unarmed, perhaps you should all toss your firearms over here; even things out, don't you know."*

Many drill sergeants believe the perfect soldier is one whose brain is not connected in the usual manner. Orders should enter his ears and move directly to his body without the intervention of his thought processes. When you put the full force of your mind behind your voice, you can achieve similar results with even the most thick-skulled or independent individuals. People leap to obey your orders without ever considering what they're doing.

**System:** The character issues a short verbal command to a maximum number of subjects equal to her Charisma dice pool. The command must take no more than three seconds (one action) to speak at normal speed, and it must be something that the average person could do in three seconds. Finally, any subjects must understand the language the mesmerist speaks (unless the character also has Perfect Translation). The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Command. Each subject who does not have more dots in Wits than the number of successes the player rolled must execute the command as his next action, unless the command would obviously place him in direct danger of death or mutilation. Inspired characters may spend a Willpower point to avoid performing the action.

### Marked Man

*"He can run all he wants. I'll find him when the time is right."*

With this Knack, you can "mark" an individual or object. This mark gives you an innate sense of your subject's location relative to you, allowing you to track it anywhere in the world! Neither distance nor intervening matter can block this sense. However, you must beware overconfidence — this Knack gives you absolutely no information on your subject's condition or surroundings.

**System:** To "mark" a character or item, the mesmerist must first touch it; the player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Navigation. The character thereafter gains a complete sense of the marked individual or object's relative dis-



tance and direction from herself, which lasts for one week per success rolled. If a living subject dies or an unliving one is destroyed, the link is broken. A character may simultaneously maintain a maximum number of marks equal to her Reflective Inspiration facet.

## Perfect Translation

*"Actually, I believe he said five hundred dollars."*

You have minor facility with telepathy. While you cannot probe another mind, you can touch the parts of consciousness that control communication. With sufficient concentration, you can understand the meanings and concepts behind virtually any form of spoken or gesture-based communication.

**System:** The character must be able to see or hear the subject without mechanical intervention — a radio broadcast or the like attenuates the thoughts behind the words too much for Perfect Translation to work. The player rolls Rapport; no Inspiration point expenditure is necessary. One success allows translation of basic concepts, three facilitate fluent conversation, and five allow the mesmerist to understand even the most complex specialized ideas (assuming she has the necessary background to comprehend internal medicine or astrophysics...).

Perfect Translation provides only the mesmerist with total understanding. Still, while others cannot understand the character's words, she can convey general concepts through body language and snippets of her conversational partner's own words. Also, a mesmerist with this Knack may use any other powers that influence the mind against targets that would otherwise not understand her.

## Psychic Hand

*"With the proper focus, I should be able to pull down that ladder and give us a way out of here like... so!"*

You can exert low levels of raw telekinetic force. You do not have the control necessary for fine manipulation and lack significant strength. Still, you can press, grasp or turn small objects with the power of your mind. In a similar vein, you can use the Psychic Hand to deflect attacks! The Psychic Hand is invisible unless you choose for it to become visible, in which case it appears as a ghostly shimmer in the air.

**System:** Psychic Hand lasts for a number of turns equal to the successes gained from an Endurance roll. Alternately, the player may spend one Inspiration to activate the Knack for the scene. While in effect, the mesmerist can move it anywhere within a radius equal to 20 meters per point of the character's Inspiration. The player declares which application of Psychic Hand he wants each time he uses it: a manipulating "hand" or a protective shield. Only one may be active at any time.

The "hand" can exert a maximum force of twice the character's Willpower in kilogram-meters per turn. So, a character with Willpower 7 can exert 14 kilogram-meters per turn: moving a one-kilogram object 14 meters or a 7-kilogram object two meters or so forth. It grasps

like a normal human hand encased in a mitten but has no capacity for fine manipulation. Likewise, it has no leverage or speed to generate any sort of attack. If a situation demands resolution by the numbers, assume the Psychic Hand has one point each in Strength and Dexterity.

The shield spreads the psychic force into flat barrier roughly one meter wide by two meters tall. Being focused psychic force, it is not impenetrable, but it can slow or deflect attacks. This shield provides bashing and lethal soak equal to the mesmerist's Reflective facet. It can be placed between any attacker and defender within the Knack's effect range. Unlike normal soak (see p. 200), if the shield reduces an attack's damage effect to zero, the defender takes no damage!

**Example:** Doctor Zorbo's men have locked Dirk (Willpower 6, Stamina 3, Reflective facet 4) away in a cell. Dirk decides to lift the pistol from the holster of his snoozing guard and bargain for his escape with bullets. The pistol weighs about one and a half kilograms, so Dirk can move it up to eight meters in one turn (12 kilogram-meters divided by 1.5 kilograms). As his cell door is only five meters from the guard, he can snatch the weapon in a single turn.

Later in his escape, another guard pops up. Dirk throws the Psychic Hand between them, giving him a total 7/4 soak. The guard fires his pistol, getting three dice on the damage effect — and drops his jaw in surprise as his bullet ricochets off the very air!

## Scientific Prodigy

*"Gentlemen, I've just had an epiphany!"*

You plumb the depths of scientific theory, constantly pushing the boundaries. However, you don't go it alone — indeed, you psychically draw upon the knowledge and creativity of the colleagues and assistants you work with! Even individuals who have no formal scientific training may be of great benefit in such an effort, for you can draw on any related knowledge they may have, no matter how little they may be consciously aware of it. Depending on your personal inclinations, you may or may not give your research team the credit it deserves.

**System:** This Knack enhances the character's super-scientific ability (see p. 176 for complete rules). It does not allow for directed sifting of others' thoughts or knowledge; instead, it acts as a kind of gestalt from which the mesmerist draws her conclusions. The character receives one additional die to her research and development roll for each assistant she has, up to a number equal to her Intelligence + Reflective facet. (The character may have more assistants, but this Knack gives her no further benefit from them.) No roll or Inspiration expenditure is needed.

## Telluric Resonance

*"Hmmm. That fellow over there isn't quite what he seems."*

All mesmerists are, by nature, attuned to Z-waves to a certain extent. However, your affinity for this energy goes beyond that of most mesmerists. You can sense the flow of



telluric energy through not only other individuals, but through the very ether itself. This sensitivity allows you to detect stalwarts and other mesmerists with a fair degree of accuracy, as well as sense the use of more powerful psychic and dynamic Knacks. You can also tell if a super-scientific device relies on telluric energy manipulation to produce its effects.

**System:** The player rolls Awareness; each success registers the general location of one mesmerist or stalwart (Telluric Awareness does not reveal daredevils) within 20 meters, starting with the closest. This Knack does not provide pinpoint accuracy, but if the subjects aren't hidden, it's easy to tell where the Z-waves are coming from. To determine if a given device is an innovative invention, the player rolls Engineering; one success gives a yes or no answer.

If another character uses a dynamic or psychic Knack within a radius of 10 times the mesmerist's Inspiration in meters, the Storyteller secretly makes an Awareness roll. A difficulty may apply, dependent on the class of the power used: standard for a level three Knack, +1 for a level two Knack or +3 for a level one Knack. One success gives the direction and distance to the character who used the power, as well as what level it is. Three successes allow the character to identify the power in use, if she has prior experience with it.

## Thermal Manipulation

*"Huh. You'd think Antarctica would be colder.... What?"*

Your grasp of so-called psychokinetic techniques may not be sufficient to ignite fires or freeze the air, but you can exert control over ambient temperature and even affect fire to some degree. Temperatures are less threatening to you than normal — the Sahara at high noon is merely pleasantly balmy, while the coldest Russian winter registers as a bit nippy. With practice, you can even extinguish small fires or melt ice with the power of your mind.

**System:** Since each end of the temperature scale requires a different mental focus, the character can only generate Thermal Manipulation for one extreme at a time. To activate the Knack for the scene, the player declares whether she is protecting against heat or cold, then spends an Inspiration point and rolls Resistance. Each success adds one to the character's soak total against sources of injury inflicted by that temperature extreme — including fire- or ice-based attacks. A single success is sufficient to immunize the character against casual extremes of temperature for up to 12 hours.

To extinguish a fire, the character concentrates on it for the turn. The player rolls Willpower. Every two successes reduce the fire's damage effect by one level (see "Fire," p. 210). A fire whose damage effect drops below three is snuffed out entirely. The fire may have a maximum radius of the character's Inspiration in meters. Melting ice uses the same mechanic, with every two successes turning one cubic meter's worth of ice to water.

## Level Two Psychic Knacks

### Brainstorm

*"You dare defy me? Fall before the very power of my mind!"*

One of the less common and more feared telepathic Knacks, as a master of Brainstorm you are capable of nothing less than a direct mind-to-mind attack. Victims of Brainstorm experience an instant of total violation, then an intense, stabbing agony in their heads as you hurl the full force of your will against them. Depending on the subject's ability to resist such effects, he may be slightly shaken or reduced to a gibbering wreck. Some victims of this power seek retribution upon recovery, as the experience can be profoundly unnerving.

**System:** The target must be within the mesmerist's line of sight and within 10 times the mesmerist's Inspiration score in meters. The player spends an Inspiration point and makes a cross-matched (Manipulation + Destructive Facet) roll; the target resists with a Willpower roll. If the mesmerist has intimate knowledge of the target's psychology (Storyteller's discretion, but casual acquaintance does not suffice), the attacker gains three additional dice on his roll. For every net success the mesmerist has, the target loses one temporary Willpower point and cannot take any action save fleeing for one subsequent turn. If she is reduced to zero temporary Willpower, she falls unconscious for (8 - Stamina rating) hours. If the mesmerist botches, the target is forever immune to all further Brainstorm attacks from him.

### Cloak of Dread

*"Don't make me angry. It would go very badly for you."*

There's something preternaturally threatening about you, something you can focus to dramatic effect on others. When you summon up the darkness that lies within your soul, you gain an aura of palpable menace. Individuals of lesser prowess shrink from you in fear as their lizard hindbrains yammer about tigers in long black coats. Animals tend to flee in terror or attack in desperation, depending on their temperaments.

**System:** The player spends an Inspiration point to activate Cloak of Dread for the scene. The character's Intimidation Ability score is doubled. Animals run from him in fear unless they are already cornered or are starving predators. Due to a subliminal belief that any attack will be met with an instant and devastating reprisal, low-grade opponents (ordinary nameless thugs) go after targets other than the character if possible; otherwise, they strike with their least damaging attacks (throwing a punch instead of using a knife, say).

### Evil Eye

*"May your ancestors visit a curse upon you!"*

This Knack is particularly difficult for psychic theoreticians to document because many of its most powerful practitioners do not believe they're using psychic powers.



You may see this Knack as a means of reducing a subject's basic self-confidence, or you may believe that you have the power to place a curse on your victims! Whatever your personal beliefs, the effects of this power are the same. When you use Evil Eye, you implant beliefs and commands into your target's subconscious mind that lessen the efficiency with which his brain and body operate.

**System:** To place a "hex" on a target, the mesmerist must look him in the eye and make some sort of sign — an arcane gesture, spitting in the subject's direction, or some similar act. The player makes a cross-matched (Wits + Destructive facet) roll; if the target is Inspired, the attacker must also spend an Inspiration point. At the Storyteller's discretion, the player may gain an additional die if her character also declares a suitably dramatic curse to the victim.

Successes on the roll are split between the duration of the "hex" and its severity, as per the following tables:

| Successes | Duration  |
|-----------|---|
| 1         | the rest of the scene   |
| 2         | eight hours   |
| 3         | one day   |
| 4         | one week  |
| 5+        | one month   |
| Successes | Effects   |
| 1         | +1 difficulty to all Willpower, Mental and Social rolls                     |
| 2         | +1 difficulty to all rolls  |
| 3         | +2 difficulty to all rolls; the subject loses one temporary Willpower point |
| 4         | +2 difficulty to all rolls; the subject loses two Willpower points          |
| 5+        | +3 difficulty to all rolls; the subject loses three Willpower points        |

A character who loses temporary Willpower points cannot regain those points until the "hex's" duration ends. Subsequent attempts to give a character the Evil Eye have no effect until the first curse expires.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the victim may end the curse before its natural expiration. Remember that the Evil Eye is actually a set of telepathic suggestions, so the problem is not mysticism — it is *belief*. Even the most rigidly scientific personalities are subject to these suggestions, so lack of belief in psychic phenomena or magic is no defense against the initial "curse." It may, however, be of aid in subsequent psychotherapy....

**Example:** *Mister Saturday places a hex upon a troublesome adventurer. Engaging the interloper in conversation during a party, the houngan informs the poor fool that he's angered the spirits. Saturday calls down the wrath of the loa upon his subject. Mister Saturday's player achieves a whopping six successes and decides to split these evenly between duration and effects. The adventurer loses one Willpower and is at +2 difficulty to all his actions for the next 24 hours.*

## Flame/Frost Conjunction

*"Ignite a fire with the power of your mind? Impossible!"*

This Knack covers two similar yet distinct talents derived from the power of the mind. Flame Conjunction lets you create fire out of nothing, while Frost Conjunction enables you to freeze the very air. These talents are referred to by layman's terms such as "firestarting" or "ice throwing" as well as more scientific labels such as pyrokinesis and cryokinesis.

Each option sees common use as a psychic weapon, though more mundane applications are possible. Pyrokinesis have been known to cook dinner or heat an apartment with the power of their minds, while cryokinesis sometimes condense water from the air to reduce the humidity or create ice cubes.

**System:** This Knack must be purchased separately for each type of manifestation, fire or ice; each type can also be used two different ways. Flame Conjunction can heat a small (hand-sized) area or hurl a fist-sized ball of flame. Frost Conjunction can freeze a small patch of an object's surface or freeze the air and project shards of ice crystals. The mechanics for each work roughly the same; the pyrokinetic application uses heat and flame while the cryokinetic version manifests as flash-freezing.

To force an immediate extreme temperature change, the character affects a target between fingertip and hand-size at a range of up to 20 meters times her Perception rating. The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Willpower; the effect sustains itself a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. A fire ignited this way burns out after the time passes, but flammable materials it ignites may burn longer. An area flash-frozen becomes so frigid and brittle that it may shatter. Used this way, the Knack has a three dice lethal damage effect, plus one die for every two successes the player rolled. Materials affected take a little while to dissipate the thermal energy; substances such as metal or stone may be painfully hot or cold to the touch for several minutes afterward.

When used as a projectile attack, the player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Awareness as a standard ranged attack roll. The attack has a range of 10 meters times the character's Perception rating. It has a base three dice lethal damage effect plus the mesmerist's rating in her Destructive Inspiration facet. Victims may dodge this attack as they would dodge any standard ranged attack. Whether a fireball or an ice blast, the attack travels in a straight line; neither psychic manipulation nor wind conditions can divert its path.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the character can perform minor tricks (lighting a lady's cigarette or warming dinner for Flame Conjunction; cooling a car's radiator or keeping ice cream from melting for Frost Conjunction) without expending an Inspiration point. In general, if something looks impressive but doesn't have any impact on the game beyond looking nifty, don't require an Inspiration expenditure or a roll for it.





The Storyteller may also allow this Knack to be used as the basis for electrical generation. This “psychic lightning” would generate a spark of electricity (enough to jump start a car battery, perhaps) or emit a crackling lightning bolt (damage as above). The Storyteller may alter certain aspects as he sees fit.

## Hypnotic Presence

*“You are falling under my spell...”*

*With but the slightest effort of your will, you can place most individuals into a light hypnotic trance. While so entranced, they are wholly susceptible to your will. You can extract answers to even the most probing questions or implant commands that your victims will never remember until they find themselves carrying them out.*

**System:** The character must make eye contact with the subject and concentrate for a turn. The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Rapport. If she scores more successes than the victim has dots in Intelligence, the hypnosis attempt succeeds. The hypnotic trance lasts for 10 minutes per point of the mesmerist’s Inspiration. During this time, the subject must answer any questions posed to him with the literal truth as he knows it.

To implant a command during the trance, the player rolls Subterfuge. Each successful command requires a number of successes equal to the subject’s Intelligence. A command may not directly violate the subject’s self-preservation instincts or basic moral code, but anything else is fair game. A mesmerist may implant a maximum number of commands equal to her own Willpower. These

commands last for a number of days equal to the mesmerist’s Command dice pool, after which they fade.

## Inspirational Aura

*“Once more unto the breach!”*

You have discovered one of the keys to maintaining the cohesion of a group in the face of even the most extreme crises. With this telepathic talent at your command, you can reinforce the psyches of your comrades and followers, instilling them with a renewed sense of purpose and a willingness to follow your orders. A sense of rightness fills the recipients, giving them the wherewithal to tackle with gusto feats that might otherwise give them pause. Masters of this Knack can convince their subordinates and allies to storm the very gates of Hell armed with nothing but buckets of ice water.

**System:** The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Command. Any difficulties to actions drop by one for every two successes rolled for the remainder of the scene (round down; three successes rolled would reduce any difficulty modifiers by one). This Knack affects each character working on the mesmerist’s side — but *not* the mesmerist himself — up to a number equaling the mesmerist’s Inspiration score. The benefit applies first to those closest to the mesmerist and can include player characters and Storyteller characters.

The mesmerist doesn’t benefit from the difficulty reduction, but still gains from this Knack. For the rest of the scene, the character adds his Reflective facet total to his Command dice pool when issuing orders to any charac-



ter who benefited from this Knack — as long as the orders are of an appropriately heroic nature. The Storyteller has the final say in what is appropriately heroic.

A character with Inspirational Aura may never gain the benefit of reduced difficulty through this Knack, either via her own use of it or through the Inspirational Aura of another character.

## Teledigitation

*"It was horrifying! These... these ghostly hands appeared and plucked the necklace from about my throat!"*

Teledigitation is the Knack that most informed people think of when they hear the word "telekinesis." While you cannot exert a large amount of sheer telekinetic force, you can perform highly intricate fine manipulations or even wield weapons! Essentially, Teledigitation gives you a pair of "spectral hands" that are every bit as capable as your own physical ones. They can pick a lock, fire a gun, mix a drink or slap an unwanted suitor. The hands are invisible unless you choose to make them visible, in which case they manifest as ghostly outlines or shimmering idealized images.

### Phantom Hands

Teledigitation has a separate effect from Psychic Hand. As such, activating the two gives the character an enhanced effect, combining telekinetic force with finesse! Triggering both Knacks simultaneously costs one Inspiration point; the effect lasts for a number of turns equal to the character's Stamina + Wits. With both Knacks in effect, the character has a pair of Phantom Hands with a Strength score equal to her Intelligence, a Dexterity rating equal to her Reflective facet and a maximum rate of movement equal to the character's Willpower in meters per turn. All other limitations apply as per the Teledigitation rules.

**System:** The player spends an Inspiration point to activate Teledigitation for a number of turns equal to the character's Stamina + Wits. This power provides a pair of "spectral hands" that the character can use like a pair of normal hands, with a range equal to 10 times the character's Inspiration score in meters. The spectral hands can do anything that a normal pair of human hands can do, acting as if they had Strength 1 and a Dexterity score equal to the character's Reflective facet + 1. If the "hands" hold physical objects, they can move at a maximum speed equal to half the character's walking speed. The character can take actions with both the spectral hands and her physical body, but the normal penalties for multiple actions apply (see p. 201).

The hands provide the character with a sense of touch comparable to her own. They have no actual physical substance; attacks pass harmlessly through them. They can act independently of one another, to the extent that a pair of normal human hands possessed by a non-ambidextrous character can, but may move no more than two meters from each other.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the character can perform minor telekinetic tricks (turning light switches on and off, fetching drinks) without expending an Inspiration point. In general, if something looks impressive but doesn't have any impact on the game beyond looking nifty, don't require an Inspiration expenditure or a roll for it.

## Level Three Psychic Knacks

### Cloud the Mind

*"I could have sworn someone was standing there just a moment ago."*

As this power's name implies, you are able to cloak your very presence from lesser individuals. When their minds are clouded, you are but a passing breeze and a flicker of shadow, barely perceptible to all but the keenest-eyed observers. This Knack is telepathic by its basic nature — it only affects the perceptions of living beings who can directly observe you. Mechanical sensors are unaffected, and photographs of a scene will still reveal your presence when developed, even if no observer remembers you being there.

**System:** The player spends an Inspiration point to activate this Knack, and the character's Stealth Ability rating is doubled for the scene. No casual observer notices the character's presence or actions unless the mesmerist does something blatantly obvious or the observer has a higher Perception score than the number of successes the player rolled on Stealth. The Storyteller is always the final arbiter of what is blatantly obvious, but a good general guideline is "anything that directly and noisily affects the observer or the surrounding scenery" (initiating combat always counts). Picking a lock isn't all that obvious if it's done out of direct sight, but kicking the door in is.

A searcher who is actively seeking the character (or actively seeking "someone who shouldn't be here, in the case of an alert patrolling guard) may roll Awareness. If he scores more successes than the player scored when activating this power, he pierces the Knack's veil of ignorance. The character may still use mundane methods of disguise or camouflage in addition to this Knack; such efforts are resolved normally.

### Mindhammer

*"No physical barrier can withstand my psychic might!"*

As a master of the most overtly powerful telekinetic Knack, you command a talent that easily makes up in sheer destructive potential what it lacks in subtlety. Mindhammer is little more than a direct telekinetic strike, an invisible piston of force that can strike hard enough to splinter wood or shatter bone.



**System:** There's little room for improvisation with this power: The mesmerist simply smacks her intended target with a telekinetic wallop. The character must be able to see her target, which must be within a range equal to 20 meters times the mesmerist's Perception rating. The player spends an Inspiration point and makes a cross-matched (Wits + Awareness) attack roll. Attempts to dodge the strike are at +2 difficulty because the target cannot see it coming. If the attack hits, it has a base bashing damage effect equal to the mesmerist's Willpower rating; extra attack successes add to the damage effect normally. The area of impact is a perfect circle approximately the same size as the attacker's clenched fist.

## Psychic Control

*"These aren't the refugees you're looking for."*

This Knack is among the most feared mesmerist powers. Having the ability to twist another's mind makes others rather nervous, so you're likely to find even close friends distancing themselves from you when they discover what you can do. Conversely, governments and private groups alike may well take an unhealthy interest in you — a nation with a pet mind-controller has an important new pawn in the game of global politics.

**System:** The target must be within a range equal to 10 meters times the mesmerist's Perception score, and the character must concentrate for a number of minutes equal to the successes needed (see below). The mesmerist's player spends an Inspiration point and a Willpower point and rolls Command in a resisted action against the subject's player, who rolls Willpower. Any successes the defender gets subtract from the mesmerist's ability to alter his mind. The mesmerist may spend additional Inspiration for successes on a one-for-one basis.

The degree of change to the target's memory depends on the final successes achieved. One success allows trivial changes (he can't remember his home address, he thinks the character has a different name); three successes applies major alterations (he forgets where he works, he believes he was married to a woman who never existed); five successes creates extensive — even disastrous — changes (he forgets to breathe, he remembers being born in Atlantis five centuries ago).

The mesmerist must decide her intended memory alteration prior to the attempt; if she doesn't get enough successes, the change has reduced intensity. The target may also "buy down" the intensity by spending one Willpower point immediately after the resisted action, modifying the alteration appropriately. The Storyteller may make the resisted roll himself to keep the resolution in doubt and has final say on suitable modifications to the original intent. Psychic Control can also be used to restore a subject's memories that were changed by some other use of this Knack (certain spies have been placed in deep cover using this very method).

**Example:** Count Nil wants Ace Borgstrom to forget he was ever engaged. The Storyteller says this requires three successes, but after the resisted action the dastardly Count has only two successes. The Storyteller decides Ace knows he's engaged — he's just not sure who it's to!

## Psychic Synergy

*"You know what to do, my loyal minions!"*

You can coordinate the actions of your underlings so well that they seem to share a single brain. Whether through singular leadership, telepathic communication or some sort of hive consciousness, you can direct your followers' behavior to lead to the most efficient outcome.

**System:** The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Command at standard difficulty. If successful, those loyal to the character may engage in complex tasks without the need for communication. The subjects need not be in the immediate vicinity, but the character must know exactly who he wants to communicate with. The number of successes indicates the scale of communication. One success allows for coordinating with up to a half-dozen people, three successes is sufficient to direct over a score of subjects, and five successes allows for directing at least 100 individuals — all without the need for radios or a chain of command! In addition, anyone affected by this Knack may also add their leader's Reflective facet to their dice pools for the rest of the scene. Finally, everyone affected by this Knack acts on the Initiative turn indicated by the highest roll within the group.

## Sleight of Will

*"For my next trick, I shall make that gentleman's monocle appear in my hand like... so!"*

This is arguably one of the most powerful Knacks in existence, though it is also one of the rarest. With this power, you can move small objects with naught but an instant of concentration and a bit of creative visualization. While telekinetic powers can achieve similar effects, Sleight of Will is unique in that the objects it acts upon do not move through the intervening space! They simply vanish from one point and appear at another with no visible motion or expenditure of energy save for a slight twinkle. To date, no mesmerist skilled in Sleight of Will has been able to move a person in this fashion (though rumors persist of particularly powerful mesmerists who can apport themselves...).

**System:** The mesmerist can move an object with a maximum weight equal to her Reflective facet in kilograms between any two points that she can sense within a radius of 20 times her Perception in meters. The two points may be anywhere within this radius, as long as she can see or feel both of them. Other Knacks that allow remote sensing count for these purposes. To move an object, the player spends an Inspiration point and makes a cross-matched (Stamina + Awareness) roll. One success is sufficient to move the object. If the player scores



three or more successes, use of Sleight of Will does not count as the character's action for this turn — so, with enough successes, this Knack could move a weapon into the character's hand in an instantaneous fast-draw!

If the mesmerist tries to move an object out of contact with another character, the player must defeat the target's player in a resisted Willpower roll. ("Out of contact" means anything the target holds or has upon his person.) Objects moved with Sleight of Will retain all of their physical and chemical properties, though the mesmerist may change their orientation as she sees fit. In practice, this means a falling object continues to fall after being moved with this Knack, but the mesmerist may choose for the object to reappear falling *upward* (though gravity will soon reverse its course). Objects moving too fast to track with the naked eye may not be affected with this Knack, which makes it useless for deflecting bullets — though it is quite effective at reversing the courses of thrown objects (such attempts are subject to the rules for hitting moving targets; see p. 201). If the character wants to change a moving object's course to target a specific individual, the player makes an Awareness roll at +1 difficulty that counts as an attack roll.

## Touch of Life

*"Dead? You are mistaken; falling from the wall merely knocked the wind out of her for a few minutes."*

Many observers consider you to be touched by God — or to be a pawn of the Devil. You can exert your will to heal virtually any injury, bringing your comrades back from the gates of death! As long as even the barest spark of life remains in your subject, you can knit broken bones and seal torn flesh with your very will.

**System:** The character touches the subject and spends a minute in concentration. The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Medicine; each success heals one level of bashing or lethal damage. For each patient, the mesmerist can heal up to twice her Reflective facet in bashing health levels and equal to her Reflective facet in lethal health levels. The player may allocate the successes to the subject as she sees fit. Even if the player fails the roll, the subject is stabilized and suffers no further blood loss or other worsening of condition. A botch, however, inflicts one additional level of bashing damage on the patient. No subject may benefit from this power more times in 24 hours than he has points of Stamina.

## Dynamic Knacks

Dynamic Knacks are the parahuman powers displayed by those Inspired individuals commonly known as *stalwarts*. Generally, dynamic Knacks are incredible extensions of normal human capabilities: Stalwarts tend to be faster, stronger, smarter, better-looking or more personable than regular people. Some extreme dynamic Knacks, however, give their stalwart possessors qualities that no "normal" human could possibly attain. As

might be expected, dynamic Knacks run the gamut from barely noticeable to freakishly bizarre. Current theory holds that dynamic Knacks are the result of the stalwart channeling Z-wave energy directly into her physical form. As such, stalwarts register as etherically active on Z-wave image resonators, and their empowered status is obvious to various superhuman methods of perception.

## Dynamic Knack Descriptions

As with psychic Knacks, dynamic Knacks are divided into three categories. The category into which a dynamic Knack falls depends on the degree to which it affects the stalwart. Level one dynamic Knacks are logical, if extreme, extensions of human development. In theory, any sufficiently gifted person could achieve comparable results given the right combination of genetics and training. Though certainly uncanny, level one Knacks are normally indistinguishable from nature's own gifts unless perceived with a Z-wave image resonator or the like. As such, their effects are often indistinguishable from those daredevils manifest. Level two dynamic Knacks are obviously superhuman, though they're still direct extrapolations from the human baseline: The stalwart is just faster, smarter or stronger than any ordinary person could ever hope to be. Level three dynamic Knacks place the stalwart firmly outside the bounds of normalcy — they're highly irregular or unnerving capabilities that surpass the usual qualities, not just capabilities, of living beings.

If purchased during character creation, a dynamic Knack costs a number of transformation points equal to its class. If purchased with experience expenditure, a level one dynamic Knack costs 8 experience points, a level two costs 12 points, and a level three is 16 points. These powers are not hierarchical; a character does not have to buy a level one Knack before purchasing a level two power.

## Level One Dynamic Knacks

### A Single Bound

*"Onward and upward!"*

Your legs are better than coiled steel springs, for no mere mechanical springboard could launch you as high as your leaps can! With this Knack, you can hurdle high walls or leap across a city street. Your physique probably reflects this Knack in some highly noticeable manner.

**System:** The character's jumping distances are tripled for both horizontal and vertical movement. If he is riding a bicycle, his movement rate is doubled. This Knack has no effect on kick attacks or foot movement rates. See "Jumping," page 188, for rules on leaping.

### Cool Hand

*"Grab the gem out of that pit of scorpions? No problem."*

You're inhumanly steady, even in the tightest situations. No matter how much your brain's screaming at you, your body keeps operating smoothly. This is not





necessarily mental composure — you may be just as prone to panic as anyone else. Instead, your body functions efficiently regardless of the stresses under which it's operating. You never get "the shakes," nor do you get seasick or shiver.

**System:** The character still suffers injury from detrimental effects to her body — wounds, drugs, illness, temperature extremes, stress — but is completely immune to Dexterity-based dice pool penalties resulting from these conditions. She gains one bonus die for all physical tasks involving ultra-fine manipulation, such as lockpicking or surgery (but *never* combat). Her rock-steady grip also doubles the effective range of all ranged weapons (firearms, bows, fire hoses, disintegrator rays...) she wields.

As a side effect of this Knack, the character never suffers any physical effects from being intoxicated. She can still get drunk, but the only outward reflection of this condition is slurred speech. She's perfectly poised right up until the point at which she passes out.

### Heightened Senses

*"Shhhh! Someone just unlocked the door downstairs!"*

A living bloodhound, telescope and microphone all rolled into one, you enjoy sensory acuity that most people can't attain without mechanical assistance. However, this blessing can occasionally be a curse — bright flashes, loud noises and noxious smells can all incapacitate you through sensory overload. You tend to avoid big band concerts and Italian kitchens.

**System:** The player gains two bonus dice on all Perception rolls that deal with tiny details or things on the edge of human perception. When the character makes an aimed ranged attack, her weapon's range doubles due to the stalwart's exceptional visual acuity (approximately 20/5 vision). Sensory overload effects are left to the Storyteller's discretion, but should be dramatic and appropriate to the circumstances.

### Mad Scientist

*"You all laughed. You said it couldn't be done. Ha! Behold the product of my genius; behold my creation!"*

You are a man of science for the new era! Your creative prowess follows no traditional path. Even the simplest schematics you design baffle the learned. Armed with only a notepad and your own formidable command of modern science, you relentlessly push back the frontiers of human achievement!

**System:** This Knack subtly transforms the character's brain chemistry to enhance her super-scientific ability (see p. 176 for complete rules). The player spends an Inspiration to convert her character's final research and development time from days to hours (this likewise results in a shorter construction time, figured from the final R&D duration). Such rapid genius is not without its price, however. The character relies so heavily on leaps of intuition and sudden bursts of creative mania that few can keep up. As a result, when using this Knack,



the character gains no dice benefit from having research assistants other than fellow stalwarts.

## Man for All Seasons

*"Come along, gentlemen. It's only the Sahara. A little sun never hurt anyone!"*

Who needs a campfire or a canteen? You can endure the utmost extremes of climate without batting an eye or losing a drop of sweat. Whether it's a hike in Death Valley in a parka or a swimsuit-clad snowball fight in the Himalayas, you're always dressed for the occasion, so to speak.

**System:** The character suffers no damage or penalties for heat less than 150° C or cold above -30° C. She is immune to heatstroke, hypothermia and similar ailments. She can survive for triple the usual times without water or food. This Knack provides no protection against actual fire- or cold-based attacks.

## Powerlifter

*"Looks like the safe is cemented into the wall." Shhhrraaaack! "There we go!"*

You can win iron man competitions merely by entering — your opponents take one look at the steel cables you call muscles and quietly shrink away. While your casual strength may be no greater than that of anyone else with your build, your focused might is truly awesome to behold.

**System:** Whenever a character attempts a Might-related task (such as encumbrance, lifting or opening/closing; see p. 188), the player rolls Might normally. In addition to the successes from the roll, your character gains a number of automatic successes equal to her Destructive facet score (no Inspiration expenditure is needed). If trying to lift a target with more mass than the character's Might dice pool, the automatic successes apply as Willpower successes needed to advance her lifting capability up the chart (see p. 188). This Knack provides no bonus to close-combat attack and damage rolls.

## Sex Symbol

*"Yowza!"*

Simply irresistible! You exude raw sexuality from every pore. A mere photograph of you is enough to send teenagers of the appropriate sexual orientation into hormonal frenzies, while your actual presence inspires even the most staid and reserved adults to youthful pursuits. You're never lacking for companionship if you want it. In fact, your biggest problem may be getting an uninterrupted night's sleep....

**System:** Whenever the stalwart attempts a seduction, the player rolls the appropriate Trait dice pool normally (see p. 192 for specifics on seduction). In addition to the successes from the roll, your character gains a number of automatic successes equal to her Intuitive facet score (no Inspiration expenditure is needed).

## Superhuman Reflexes

*"I've never seen anyone move so fast!"*

Your hands are faster than striking cobras, flickering at the edges of human perception. It may be possible to

surprise you, but no Old West gunslinger could have ever out-drawn you. The proverbial greased lightning would have trouble striking you if you knew it was on the way.

**System:** The character gains a permanent +3 bonus to Initiative.

## Level Two Dynamic Knacks

### Aetheric Vision

*"I sense a powerful electrical charge emanating from that panel. Perhaps we should step back."*

You can transform the delicate structure of your eyes to perceive portions of the electromagnetic spectrum that are completely inaccessible to normal people. This power allows you to see heat, infrared and ultraviolet radiation and even magnetic fields or strong electrical charges. If you are of a mystic bent, you may consider these energies to be auras and ley lines. If you have advanced scientific training, glowing schematics may superimpose themselves over your normal vision.

**System:** The player spends an Inspiration point to activate Aetheric Vision for the scene. While this Knack is active, the character takes no penalties for low light — even in complete darkness, she can see as if she had the benefit of full daylight. With a successful Engineering roll, she can visually trace the path of active electrical circuits, up to locating live wires inside walls. Other applications of this power are left to the Storyteller's discretion, but may include such feats as seeing a concealed assassin's body heat through a curtain or a thin door, tracking an airplane by the atmospheric ionization it leaves or detecting an area of dangerous radiation by its unnatural glow.

Remember that **Adventure**-era scientists don't know nearly as much about the electromagnetic spectrum as modern physicists do. Accordingly, characters may see what they *expect* to see rather than what science dictates they *should* see. They may also witness phenomena for which modern physics has no rational explanation....

### Blazing Speed

*"How in the world did you fend off those three soldiers while entering the proper code to turn off the doomsday device?!"*

When seconds count, you have twice as many as everyone else — at least from your perspective. With an instant's expenditure from your reserves of energy, you can supercharge your nerves, moving at blinding speeds to devastating effect. However, the concentration required to keep your body from flailing out of control does make you consider your actions more carefully, which may result in a momentary hesitation before you spring into motion.

**System:** At the beginning of a combat turn, before the Initiative roll, the player spends an Inspiration point. The stalwart can take one *additional* action at the end of the turn, after every other character has taken his normal action. This additional action can be used just like a regular action — split into multiple actions, used to go



fully defensive or taken as a single full action. The stalwart acts at -3 to Initiative during this turn.

## Blindfighter

Wham! Wa-pow! *"Gentlemen, it doesn't help to turn out the lights when you're all breathing as loudly as overweight water buffalo."*

The phrase "blind as a bat" always gives you a bit of a chuckle. After all, bats never run into things. You may have developed this Knack to compensate for actual blindness, or it may be the result of extensive training. Regardless, darkness holds few secrets for you — an advantage that you can apply to lethal effect in combat situations.

**System:** The character suffers no penalties for movement or close combat in low light or darkness. Ranged combat and perception rolls related to anything except spatial awareness suffer the normal penalties. The character can perceive shapes out to a radius of twice her Inspiration in meters. However, she can't sense them precisely enough to aim or dodge ranged attacks, nor can she sense surface details such as color or texture.

## Optimized Metabolism

*"You're almost 60? You can't be serious; you don't look a day over 30!"*

Methuselah was a pretender. You may not be set up to live forever, but for all intents and purposes, you just may pull it off — so long as none of your enemies get you. Your body requires only trace amounts of nutrients to function, as you derive the majority of your sustenance from etheric radiation and other forms of pure energy. It also refuses to process anything that it can't use, which makes you immune to many poisons.

**System:** Once the character reaches physical maturity, she ages approximately one year for every [Stamina x 10] years that pass. She can hold her breath for five times as long as a normal human with the equivalent Endurance, needs only one meal a week and takes no damage from ingested poisons or allergic reactions. She is immune to all known diseases. Alcohol and most other drugs have no effect on her whatsoever. Chemicals that physically damage her, such as acids, have their normal effects.

## Piledriver

*"The guy wasn't human, boss — he punched right through the brick wall and dragged me outside!"*

Some men break hearts; others break laws. You prefer to break bones... and bricks... and the occasional steel girder. Whether it's from a special diet, cosmic radiation, years of meditation or an inexplicable telluric energy pattern in your bones, you can strike with inhuman force. Your kicks and punches can shatter stone, and anything short of an armored car is vulnerable to you.

**System:** Add the character's Destructive Facet to his Strength rating when calculating any damage effect based on Strength, whether for punching a mobster or a metal

door. This Knack has no effect on any other situation in which the character's Strength is a factor, except feats of strength that directly involve destroying something.

## Sun Tzu's Blessing

*"If I were him, I'd make a diversion over there and bring my men in from the south — what's that alarm? Well, there you go!"*

This Knack goes by various names, depending on where you're from. The French refer to it as the Touch of Napoleon, while Greeks hearken back to the glory of Belisarius when discussing your tactical prowess. Whatever the label, the effects are the same: You have an intuitive flair for the geometry of battle. With a single glance, you can assess a tactical situation involving thousands of men, and a moment's reflection tells you where best to exert pressure to break the enemy's forces. Beware hubris, however — knowing what orders to give is not the same as knowing how to give them....

**System:** The character has an innate sense of strategy and tactics that surpasses those of many trained generals. When analyzing a battle's progress, developing a plan for an assault, finding the best way out of an ambush or performing any other military- or tactics-related analysis, the player rolls the relevant Trait dice pool normally (typically Command). In addition to the successes from the roll, your character gains a number of automatic successes equal to her Reflective Facet rating (no Inspiration expenditure is needed). This Knack gives no bonus to actually issuing orders, only on figuring out what orders to give.

## Touch of the Muses

*"Another masterpiece? You flatter me. This is just something I whipped up before breakfast."*

The gods smile upon your artistic efforts — or maybe the Devil inspires you to greatness. Whatever the source, you can achieve a level of aesthetic creativity to which most people can only aspire in vain. Your original vision is nigh-perfect, and your ability to execute it in paint, ink or stone is not far behind.

**System:** This Knack applies to any physical creative endeavor, be it sculpting, painting, choreography or the like. Note that this Knack focuses on arts with a primarily physical aspect; pursuits such as writing or poetry don't count. The player rolls the relevant Trait dice pool (typically Arts or Perform). In addition to the successes from the roll, your character gains a number of automatic successes equal to her Intuitive Facet rating (no Inspiration expenditure is needed).

At the Storyteller's discretion, the player pays only half the normal experience cost when purchasing Backgrounds that are directly related to the character's artistic endeavors. The Backgrounds most likely to be affected by this are Resources (from the sale of works of art) and Allies, Contact, Mentor and Followers (individuals who seek out the character because of her genius).



## Level Three Dynamic Knacks

### Body of Bronze

*"I have to stop getting into gunfights. My wardrobe's taking a beating!"*

When the shooting starts, most people dive for cover. Your friends, however, know that the safest place to be is directly behind you! This isn't out of concern for your marksmanship, but rather because of your inhumanly resilient physique. Your skin retains its normal consistency to a casual caress, but is as strong as steel when it comes to resisting injury. You laugh at clubs and knives, and bullets are but as wasp stings. Just watch out for those antitank rifles....

**System:** The character has an innate armor rating, as if her skin was a bulletproof vest! Her bashing armor rating is equal to two plus her Reflective facet, while her lethal armor rating is equal to two plus her Intuitive facet. Thus, a character who has Reflective facet 2 and Intuitive facet 1 has a [4/3] armor rating. This armor inflicts no penalties on mobility. These ratings are always consistent with the character's current Inspiration facet scores.

### Indisputable Analysis

*"Sherlock Holmes? An amateur."*

Your physical senses are transformed to interact with a synergy that is truly breathtaking to behold. Your powers of observation and deduction put the local police to shame. A mere glance at a scene can tell you more than you ever wanted to know about the place. This Knack is nothing less than a capacity for total situational awareness and subconscious analysis of everything you sense.

**System:** The character spends at least one minute observing the tableau she wishes to analyze. The player spends an Inspiration point and makes a cross-matched (Intelligence + Awareness) roll. For the rest of the scene, the player gains a number of bonus dice equal to the number of successes she rolled, which she may apply to all Investigation rolls that deal with the people, place and/or things she's observing. This Knack may be used once per scene on a given location. In practice, this Knack functions much like Sherlock Holmes' capacity for extreme logical deduction — the character can reach (almost always correct) conclusions from the barest scraps of physical evidence.

### Man of Many Faces

*"I know I just left, but I forgot something in my room. Would you mind letting me back in?"*

With this Knack, you can actually change your physical features to look like someone else's. Even minimal control allows you to shift your features subtly to look like some nondescript everyman. With more precise command, you can alter your features, voice, physical dimensions, garb, race and even gender!

**System:** To assume another appearance, the character spends 30 seconds (six turns) in concentration. The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Disguise (if the character is trying to conceal her own identity with a

made-up one) or Perform (if the character is attempting to assume a specific person's identity). If the player succeeds, the alteration lasts for the remainder of the scene or until the character voluntarily discontinues it. It requires minimal concentration to maintain the change; if the character is knocked unconscious or suffers three or more health levels of damage in one turn, her body automatically reverts to its normal appearance.

The number of successes rolled determine the degree to which the character can change her perceived identity:

| Successes | Degree of Change   |
|-----------|--|
| 1         | Same basic appearance, but all distinguishing details vanish |
| 2         | Coloration and build changes                                 |
| 3         | Complete change of facial features                           |
| 4         | Full transformation of voice and physical mannerisms         |
| 5         | Gender shift, extremes of age and size                       |

The stalwart cannot actually fake any knowledge that her subject has but she doesn't. With fewer than four successes, the character must rely on innate acting ability (Perform and Disguise rolls) to convincingly pass herself off as someone else. With four or more successes, her proficiency is such that others assume any gaps in her performance are flaws of their own faulty perceptions or memories.

### Reptilian Regeneration

*"Damn; the grizzly bit my hand off! How inconvenient!"*

Some lizards possess the uncanny capacity to regenerate lost limbs over a matter of days. You can go them one better, knitting torn flesh and regrowing missing pieces of yourself in mere minutes. This distinctly unnatural Knack allows you to endure injuries that would destroy any normal person.

**System:** To regenerate, the character enters a deep trance from which nothing short of a health level of bashing damage can awaken her. The player spends an Inspiration point and rolls Endurance. Each success is one health level of damage healed. A health level of bashing damage heals in one minute; a health level of lethal damage heals in 10 minutes. When the character has healed as much damage as the roll allows, she awakens.

### Sensory Filtering

*"We're looking for a man with a red tie? Give me a moment... there he is!"*

Some wives complain that their husbands have selective hearing because they can hear baseball scores but not requests to mow the lawn. Those husbands would envy you if they knew of your capabilities because all of your senses are selective. You can tune out the din of a crowd to zero in on a single conversation, refuse to see everything of a particular color or ignore the flashes of a blinding strobe light.

**System:** Sensory Filtering is always active. This Knack negates all dice pool and difficulty penalties for



distractions such as noxious smells, deafening noises, blinding lights and the like. The character is immune to sudden sensory shocks such as flash-blinding from a magnesium flare. He can also choose to isolate a single sensory impulse, blocking out all sound save for a single conversation or picking the smell of poison out of a dinner buffet. When used in conjunction with Heightened Senses, this Knack removes the danger of sensory overload that otherwise accompanies use of that Knack.

## Threat Awareness

"Look out; he's about to—" Whack! "—ha! There; never mind."

You're the perfect bodyguard. Whether it's an instinctive feel for a subject's posture and body language or uncanny precognition, you always know when someone is about to launch an attack. This split-second warning is enough to let you throw the first punch. You'd best be careful when choosing your responses — "I knew he was going to shoot me" isn't always the best defense against charges of unprovoked murder.

**System:** The stalwart always knows when a living subject whose presence she is aware of is about to make an

offensive move against *anyone* in the immediate area. The subject must be within line of sight — *though the stalwart needn't be looking at him!* — and no farther away than 10 times the stalwart's Inspiration in meters. The Storyteller tells the player the subject is about to attack and who the intended target is. The character receives no other information, though some things may be obvious — if the subject is holding a pistol, chances are good that he's not going to throw a rock at his intended victim.

The stalwart may then perform one action before the attacker does. In the first turn of any combat for which the stalwart has no more than three seconds' warning, she gains a bonus to her Initiative score equal to her Awareness dice pool. In each subsequent combat turn, this bonus drops by two, until it fades to nothing.

This Knack provides no defense against attacks from individuals of whose presence the stalwart isn't aware, or who are beyond the range of clear sensing. She must see, hear and/or feel potential attackers to sense what they're about to do. Likewise, it provides no warning regarding machinery; automatons and land mines don't have body language for the character to read or presence for her to sense.





# CHAPTER SUPER-SCIENCE FILE

The science of tomorrow, brought to you today! Autogyros! Invisible security rays! Disintegration guns! Self-cleaning kitchens! Silk-steel! Anti-aging elixirs! Zeppelin sky-fortresses! Submersible yachts! Forty-eight tools in one!

The Adventure Era is one in which men of steel walk the earth — sometimes literally! Thanks to the parahuman capacity for invention bestowed by Inspiration itself, certain institutions and individuals have produced devices that baffle the mind and appear to defy natural laws. Super-science is more than mere science — it's Inspired! Drawing on the powers of their minds (and sometimes those of their assistants), Inspired scientists can leap years ahead of their colleagues, developing devices and compounds wholly unknown to conventional wisdom.

Inspired characters of all types enjoy the benefits of super-science, although some restrictions apply to certain character types. In some cases, a super-scientific device amplifies an adventurer's natural capacity to manipulate telluric energy. Although all Inspired have this capability, mesmerists and stalwarts have a greater capacity to create inventions than daredevils do. Regardless of the type of adventurer involved, creating super-scientific devices demands incredible commitment. This commitment is reflected in the rules by requiring a prospective inventor to have Ability mastery in the skill (or skills) necessary to make the desired equipment.

## Inventions

When we talk about an *invention*, we're referring to a product of super-science, regardless of its general nature. By and large, super-science is focused on the creation of new mechanical devices. Medical and chemical experimentation play their own parts, but the vast majority of development comes in the form of mechanical invention and gadgetry. Super-science *can* produce a better mouse or better cheese in addition to the better mousetrap, but 98 percent of super-science is about the mousetrap itself. If we refer to a mechanical apparatus created with super-science, it's a *device*. An animal or plant that super-science has altered is an *organism*. A new super-scientific chemical or drug is a *compound*.

## Advancements and Innovations

Super-science divides inventions into two categories: Advancements and Innovations. An Advancement is

a direct linear development of an existing concept — the better mousetrap, as it were. It doesn't break the known laws of physics, but rather, leaps a generation or two ahead of the current state of the art. This is reflected in the rules by adding *options* to existing technology. With the proper skill, any person can use an Advanced invention indefinitely (or at least until it breaks down normally). An Innovation goes beyond mere physical improvements, channeling Z-waves to reproduce effects that only an Inspired mind can normally enact — in other words, it duplicates a *Knack effect*. An Innovation may include Advancement options, but an Advancement cannot include a Knack effect. Any invention that has a Knack effect is always considered an Innovation.

Daredevils may construct Advancements but cannot create Innovations. They're not quite to the intellectual plateau necessary to derive truly Innovative devices, just as normal folk don't have the wherewithal to make Advanced inventions. Mesmerists and stalwarts can create inventions of either type.

Any character, Inspired and otherwise, can have a number of Advanced inventions equal to twice his Resources rating. Additionally, an Inspired character can have a number of Advanced and/or Innovative inventions up to his Inspiration score. The latter category includes daredevils; although they cannot create Innovations, they can use them as easily as mesmerists and stalwarts can. This does *not* include any inventions purchased with the Gadget Background. The character may have as many gadgets as he likes, so long as he has the bonus, transformation and/or experience points to spend.

## Gadgets and Super-Science

Implements purchased under the Gadget Background (see p. 146) are distinct from items created via the super-science rules. However, the distinction is not one of function but of its importance to the character and/or the story.

A gadget is a special item unique to a character, a defining aspect of who that character is. As an example, although both are certainly inventions, Cliff (the Rocketeer) Secord's rocket pack is a gadget but Tom Strong's autogyro backpack is not. The Rocketeer wouldn't be who he is without his jet pack, while specific equipment is incidental to defining Tom Strong's character. A super-science invention is a marvelous creation, but unless it's purchased as a gadget, it is not considered an intrinsic aspect of the character who built it (or who uses it).



## Inventions for Starting Characters

It's not immediately obvious how a character can begin game play with inventions (aside from buying them as gadgets). It's simple: The player follows the super-science rules to create a device, organism or compound. The time required to design and build the invention is factored into the character's history, but the whole thing's considered complete by the start of game play. Finally, the player spends temporary Inspiration for the invention, as listed below. This is the only way in which a character might begin a game with a temporary Inspiration pool lower than his permanent score.

| Cost | Advancement | Innovation        |
|------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1    | 5 options   | level one Knack   |
| 2    | 10 options  | level two Knack   |
| 3    | 15 options  | level three Knack |

The Storyteller may allow a character to start with a total number of inventions equal to half his initial Inspiration rating (round down).

and arduous process, though you don't have to roleplay it out. The time spent on researching information, designing schematics, performing tests and the like is normally considered downtime unless the Storyteller decides to interject a dramatic event of some sort (enemy attack, lab accident, reappearance of an old flame). With the desired research and development project declared, you must still determine two things: how long it'll take to complete the research and whether it's ultimately successful. The R&D roll, based on the character's Ability mastery dice pool, takes care of both those factors.

An inventor won't know if his theory was valid until he completes his research (or at least until after he's a fair ways into it already). These rules call for the roll to be made first, since the successes gained can influence the final time taken. The Storyteller may make this roll if she wants to keep some suspense as to the result. A successful roll indicates the research was favorable. A failed roll reflects some misstep along the way — in the experiments, in some aspect of the theory, etc. — but the basic idea remains sound. A botch reveals the theorized invention is beyond the character's capacity to create (it might also involve some kind of lab accident, depending on the botch's severity). An inventor may attempt a new period of R&D after a failed roll, but he may never try creating the proposed invention again after a botch. Whatever the result, the character is committed to spending the time required in R&D.

The extra successes from the roll influence how long the research takes. Each design option has a minimum R&D time, listed in days (see the respective charts below). This time assumes the inventor spends roughly 10 hours of the day with no appreciable interruptions in a suitable facility. Standard success on the R&D roll means the character succeeds but takes the full amount of time listed. Each extra success on the roll reduces this time by one day (to a minimum of one day). Certain variables can further add to or take away from this time, as outlined below.

## Lab Time

The inventor isn't expected to spend all his time on R&D — it would put a serious crimp in his adventuring lifestyle if he did! The listed times allow for 14 hours each day the character *isn't* spending in the lab — time spent eating, sleeping, socializing, investigating or attending to sundry other matters.

The inventor can sequester himself and do nothing else but pursue R&D, though. For every three days he's "locked in the lab," the inventor can reduce the total R&D time by one day. The character does nothing but work and sleep (the latter typically on a cot in the corner). Meals are haphazard affairs scarfed down while poring over data, and the inventor forgoes any outside socialization. Conversely, if the inventor's work is interrupted for an appreciable time — having run out of materiel or resources needed for the project, being forced to leave

## Super-Scientific Creation

Before creating anything, a character must first have Ability mastery in the relevant Trait, as determined by the intended creation. Constructing a device requires Ability mastery in Engineering, creating an organism takes Medicine, and developing a compound requires Science.

The inventor must also have at least three dots in the Ability most appropriate to the proposed creation. Most often, this is the Ability used to operate the completed invention. So, a pistol that uses electricity to fire projectiles is based on Firearms; a miniature submersible is based on Pilot; a set of automatic lockpicks is based on Legerdemain; a remote-controlled motorcycle is based on Drive; and so on. In some circumstances, the primary Ability of Engineering, Medicine or Science is most suitable, in which case, no secondary skill is required.

The invention then goes through three distinct stages (regardless of whether it's an Advancement or an Innovation): research and development, construction, and use.

## Step One: Research and Development

Research and development (R&D) can be a long



the lab (willingly or otherwise) to deal with other matters and so on — the countdown pauses until he can resume his research.

## Research Assistants

The Adventure Era is a time of tremendous scientific excitement. Boundaries are being pushed in every direction, and many scientists will stop at nothing to be the first to break new ground. For every upstanding and ethical researcher, there is a diabolical scientist who will break laws and ethics to achieve his goal... including stealing designs and prototypes from fellow scientists! Not surprisingly, most inventors guard their research jealously, a great number of them working alone even though an extra pair of hands would help their work tremendously. Other inventors are not quite so paranoid and are willing to bring aboard skilled lab assistants. Yet even the most optimistic inventor understands that the possibility of betrayal exists in this environment. That new lab worker may have impressive credentials, but who's to say he's not spying for the sinister Machinatrix?

Some inventors are willing to take the risk for the sake of science. If nothing else, splitting the work among multiple people helps speed things along. The trick is getting assistants trained in the fields the inventor needs. If the inventor offers a lucrative wage and/or is working on a project that would get even the most jaded researcher frothing at the mouth, it's not hard to get good help.

A research assistant gives the inventor additional dice for the R&D attempt, thereby adding to the chance of success on the project (and potentially reducing the time spent on research and development). The player gains bonus dice depending on the composition of the character's research team, as shown in the following table:

| Bonus Dice | Research Assistant                                      |
|------------|---|
| 1          | has three or more dots in the appropriate Ability       |
| 1          | has three or more dots in one or more related Abilities |
| 1          | is Inspired   |

These dice pool bonuses are cumulative. If the research involves developing a new rapid-fire machine gun, a research assistant with Engineering (the primary Ability) 4 and Firearms (a related Ability) 4 adds two bonus dice; if she's also Inspired, she adds another die. An inventor can have a maximum number of non-Inspired research assistants equal to the sum of his Intelligence and Charisma. Other Inspired characters do not count toward this total.

## Inspiration

Inspiration is essential when creating devices, organisms or compounds undreamed of by modern science. The player must spend one Inspiration for each new R&D attempt his character makes. Inspiration may also be used during research and development to speed the process along. Each point of Inspiration spent (beyond the initial one for the research itself) reduces the total R&D time

by three days (to a minimum of one day). Any Inspiration points are spent when the R&D roll is made and are lost regardless of whether the research is ultimately successful — the inventor may be brilliant, but he's not necessarily *correct* in his hypothesis.

## Knacks

Characters with the Gadgeteer, Scientific Prodigy or Mad Scientist Knacks are singular individuals among a field of already impressive inventors. The Inspired with one of these Knacks can design and create inventions more easily and in less time than your average Inspired inventor. See each Knack's description for details on how it can assist a character.

## Step Two: Construction

Once the research is complete, the character must build his invention. This requires four things: time, funding, facilities and a copy of the completed plans for the invention. Yes, this means that a rival can steal an inventor's only blueprints — or vice versa!

Construction time is left to the Storyteller's discretion but should reflect the complexity and size of the invention in question, as well as the amount of super-science that went into it. A handgun that fires shotgun shells will take less work than a heavy-duty mineral mining submarine. The following table provides a general guide to construction time as a function of the total time spent on successful R&D:

| R&D Time         | Construction Time   |
|------------------|---------------------|
| one to five days | four hours          |
| up to 10 days    | eight hours         |
| up to 15 days    | 12 hours            |
| up to 20 days    | one day             |
| up to 30 days    | two days            |
| up to 60 days    | two weeks           |
| up to 120 days   | one month           |
| up to 180 days   | two to three months |
| up to 270 days   | three to six months |
| over 270 days    | six to 18 months    |

Particularly intricate super-science may require a great deal of funding — while some scientists can build their hardware out of spit and baling wire, most would prefer to use freshly forged steel. The Storyteller is advised to set whatever financial requirements she sees fit, but getting funding should be an occasional plot point rather than a constant irritant (unless the player insists on constantly devising expensive and unbalancing inventions). In general, the higher the inventor's Resources rating, the less of an issue funding becomes. Super-scientific success can even lead to more Resources, if the scientist markets his product properly.

In addition, most construction above the level of personal equipment requires a dedicated facility — a garage workbench isn't sufficient for zeppelin manufacture. This is a common-sense ruling. Assume that vehicu-



lar construction requires a facility at least three times as large as the vehicle itself. Chemical super-science requires a functioning lab, and medical super-science must have a surgical theatre.

Finally, an Innovation requires spending Inspiration to make it function (initially charging it). The character must spend a total number of Inspiration points equal to half the invention's number of charges. This expenditure may take place at any time during construction.

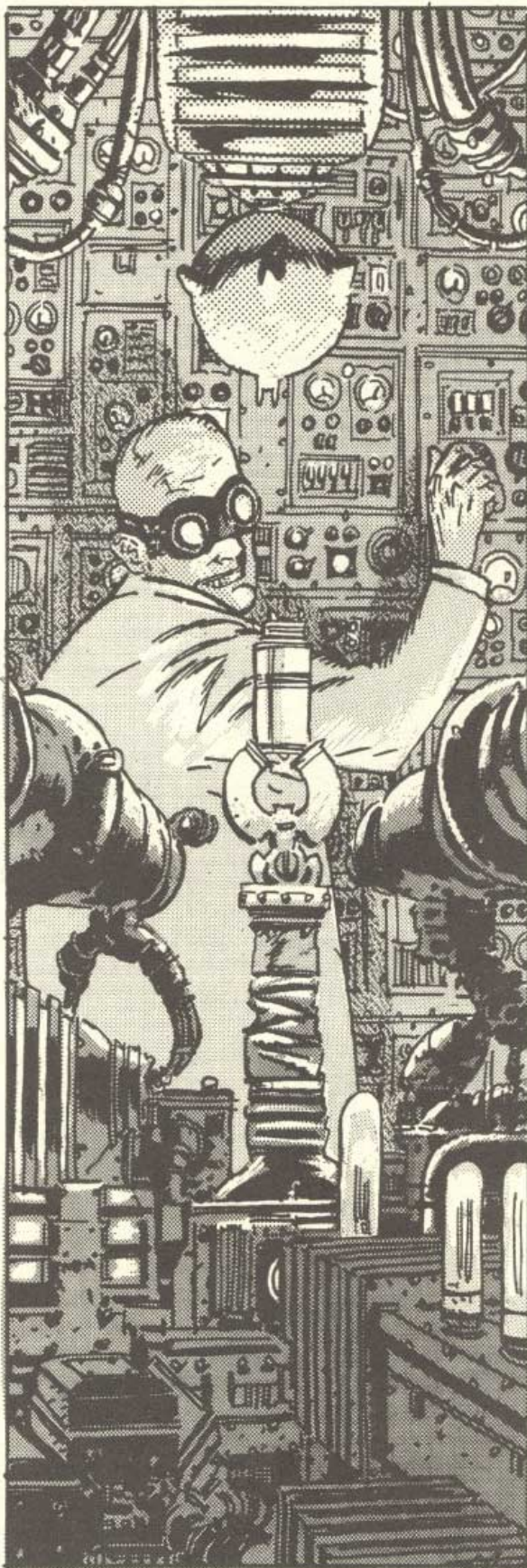
### Step Three: Field Testing

There's a running joke in the military that the most dangerous assignment isn't front-line infantry — it's assisting the munitions lab with R&D work. The same holds true for those brave (or foolish) souls who help scientists expand the bounds of modern technology. Advancements are typically more reliable than Innovations and are easier to use. Anyone with the appropriate Ability can use an Advancement: Firearms for an Advanced pistol, Drive for an Advanced car and so on.

Innovations are more complicated (tired of hearing that yet?). The user must first meet the invention's Usability requirements (see "Innovative Super-Science," below). If he doesn't, he can't use it — period. Each use of the invention counts as an action, just like using one of the character's own Abilities or Knacks. The player rolls the invention's dice pool for its effect. If the character has the same Knack that the invention produces, the player can roll the character's dice pool instead. Each use of an Innovation, successful or not, uses one charge. When the invention's charges are exhausted, it has one reserve charge left. This last charge is the Inspiration that keeps the invention in working condition. If a user drains the reserve charge, the invention breaks immediately after producing the effect — interior wiring melting to slag, delicate components fusing and so on — and cannot be repaired. As long as the inventor retains the schematics, though, he may construct a new invention.

### Repairing Inventions

Nothing runs perfectly forever (except for a perpetual motion machine, but if anyone's built it, they're not talking). When an invention is damaged or suffers malfunction (due to attack, wear and tear, a botch, dramatic editing or a convenient plot point), any character with Ability mastery in the appropriate Field of study may perform repairs, as described in the Appendix (p. 256). Maintenance and repair by the un-Inspired is more difficult due to the enhanced design: +1 difficulty for every two options in the invention. An Inspired character with the appropriate Ability mastery ignores this difficulty penalty (he just seems to have the, well, *knack* for this sort of thing). Reverse-engineering is difficult, but a sufficiently adept specialist can do it, at the Storyteller's discretion.



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## Advanced Super-Science

The following tables list the various options available to Advancements. A given invention may have a single option or may be equipped with multiple options. (An invention that has options and a Knack effect is considered an Innovation.) The more options a proposed Advancement has, the more difficult it is to design and the longer it takes to create. The R&D column for each Advancement category shows the number of days the inventor must spend in research and development. An Advancement can only be applied once unless a given option explicitly lists that multiple levels are possible. The time listed is cumulative for all options and levels. So, a single level one option requiring seven days has an initial one week R&D time; increasing that option to level three and adding another level one option that takes 10 days shoots the initial R&D time to 31 days.

Each level beyond the first for a single option adds +1 difficulty to all related R&D rolls (cumulative). This penalty applies even if the inventor adds one level, then enhances the invention with another level at a later date. Refining something gets trickier the further you go, no matter the time taken in between steps. Unlike the successive refinements of higher levels, working on different options does *not* add to difficulty (unless specifically indicated otherwise). It does increase the basic research and development time, however.

The options listed are by no means definitive. While the most common Advancements are to weapons or vehicles, virtually anything is fair game for super-scientific improvement. Storytellers should allow players to introduce new enhanced weirdness — with approval, of course! Bear in mind that the systems in this chapter (as with this book as a whole) are meant to provide a streamlined, fun and easy to use framework by which players can give their characters neat things. The point is *not* to give players an excuse to make the most devastating creations imaginable, then run roughshod all over their opponents. The Storyteller shouldn't hesitate to say a proposed invention is too powerful or simply is not suitable for the game.

### Personal Weapons

Guns lend themselves prominently to enhancement, but other weapons such as crossbows and melee weapons may also be improved. Advanced guns tend to incorporate improvements that a modern-day gunsmith would recognize. Improved accuracy can come from ported barrels, ergonomic grips or even gyroscopic recoil compensation spheres. Advanced damage can be reflected in better ammunition or more efficient use of the chemical energy released by existing ammunition. Increased ammo capacity and range and reduced size are just factors of a more efficient, streamlined and refined mechanical design.

Advanced melee weapons are masterworks that Muramasa or Wyrcon would envy. They conform to the wielder's hand as if an extension of his body, and their cutting edges and striking surfaces are so perfectly honed and shaped as to deliver more energy than would seem possible for something of the weapon's size and weight. It's amazing what you can accomplish by improving on the basics of the lever.

A device may include no more than six personal weapon Advancement options in total.

| R&D | Option   |
|-----|--|
| 3   | +1 accuracy (up to three levels)   |
| 7   | +1 damage (up to three levels)   |
| 3   | +50% ammunition capacity (up to two levels)  |
| 5   | +50% range (up to four levels)   |
| 10  | -1 conceal rating (1 to P, etc.); no smaller than P  |
| 7   | disguise true appearance (sword, cane, umbrella pistol, etc.); +2 difficulty to Awareness to pierce the disguise |
| 15  | change damage type (bashing to lethal, lethal to bashing)  |

### Vehicle Weapons

Generally, Advanced vehicle weapons are just like Advanced firearms: more "modern," in an early 21st-century sense. While they don't incorporate electronic targeting, some may have very sophisticated mechanical sighting aids.

A device may include no more than six vehicle weapon Advancement options in total.

| R&D | Option   |
|-----|--|
| 5   | +1 accuracy (up to three levels)   |
| 10  | +1 damage (up to three levels)   |
| 5   | +50% ammunition capacity (up to two levels)  |
| 7   | +50% range (up to four levels)   |
| 10  | disguise true appearance (support beam, smokestack, etc.); +2 difficulty to Awareness to pierce the disguise |

### Vehicles

Aeroplanes, steam trains and touring automobiles! As with the previous lists, assume each Advancement option is restricted to one level unless explicitly stated otherwise.

The total vehicle options possible in a single invention depends on its size. A one- or two-person conveyance can have up to 10 vehicle Advancement options; up to a 12-passenger invention can have up to 20 vehicle Advancement options; anything larger can have up to 30 vehicle Advancement options.

| R&D | Option  |
|-----|---|
| 1   | +1 passenger *                                |
| 2   | +25% cargo capacity *                         |
| 10  | +25% speed (safe and max) (eight level limit) |



- 10 +1 maneuver (five level limit)
- 15 +1 [2] armor (three level limit)
- 10 conceal existing armor (purchase equal to armor level)
- 1 personal-scale weapons mount (e.g., machine gun) \*
- 5 vehicle-scale weapons mount (e.g., 3-inch cannon) \*
- 1 conceal existing personal-scale weapons mount
- 5 conceal existing vehicle-scale weapons mount
- 10 heavy industrial equipment (e.g., mining drill, crane)
- 2 living quarters (barracks, 4 occupants) \*
- 3 living quarters (luxury, 1 occupant) \*
- 20 mobile laboratory \*
- 20 support facilities for one smaller vehicle (e.g., biplane hangar in a zeppelin) \*
- 10 improved fuel efficiency (2x normal) (five level limit)
- 50 extra movement mode (e.g., submersible biplane or aero-car)

\* The option allows multiple levels. This option is not an increasing refinement of a basic design, so the additional levels do not add to the R&D roll difficulty. Further, the specific level limit depends on the vehicle. Due to the wide range of sizes inherent in vehicles, the Storyteller must apply common sense. A motorcycle won't support the same range of modifications that a dirigible will — just try making four men live off the back of that cycle! In addition, it may be easiest to get a copy of a photograph, schematic or blueprint of a typical vehicle and sketch on the proposed additions. If it looks completely implausible even for the pulp genre, it probably is.

## Medical Experimentation

Many aspects of modern medicine that we take for granted were largely unknown eight decades ago. Inspired characters may sidestep their fellow doctors' limits, particularly when performing physical alterations to subjects. Such practice is usually the tool of demented villains — no respectable physician would perform chitin transplants on unwilling soldiers! — but some heroes may find it worth the medical risks and social costs to gain an extra edge in the fights of their lives.

Each super-surgery subject is different, and thus, a given procedure must be planned separately for each individual recipient. Although the R&D time remains the same, the actual procedure's duration differs from that required to construct a device. To keep things simple, a super-surgery procedure requires one hour for every day of R&D, with a minimum of four hours. The surgery must be performed in one stretch — it's impossible to split up a single super-scientific surgical proce-

## Size Does Matter

Super-science allows for miniature versions of existing equipment or inventions. Such miniaturization may include anything from making a backpack version of an autogyro to making a wristwatch-sized ham radio. The invention still functions as normal; it's just smaller. The chart below lists general sizes and matching examples. If you want to make a smaller version of a given item, pick the appropriate size and go down the chart until you reach the size you're going for. Each step down the chart adds three days to the initial R&D time and +1 difficulty to the Ability mastery roll.

As always, the Storyteller may dictate an appropriate starting size for an invention and may restrict the degree to which it can be miniaturized — a modest-sized backpack flamethrower reduced to a tiny lady's atomizer might be appropriate for some games but not others.

| Size              | Example  |
|-------------------|--|
| gigantic          | dirigible, cruise ship, brownstone                 |
| huge              | aeroplane, sailboat                                |
| large             | automobile, autogyro                               |
| big               | motorcycle, phone booth                            |
| average           | steamer trunk, .50 machine gun                     |
| modest            | ham radio, briefcase, shotgun                      |
| small purse, tiny | pistol, pie tin, wristwatch, belt-buckle, atomizer |

dure. A lead surgeon (minimum Medicine 4 Ability rating) must attend at all times. Particularly long operations may require multiple teams of doctors.

Super-surgery reduces the subject to the Crippled health level. He must heal up from this naturally (unless a Knack or a super-drug speeds his recuperation). Botches during surgery tend to be fatal. Botches during the planning stage usually result in operations that go perfectly well but results that don't turn out quite as anticipated. Dr. Moreau, anyone?

Caution: Side-effects may result! Even with a fully successful operation, adding chitin plating or a prehensile tail can cause certain compensatory limitations. Armor may reduce the character's movement rate, a tail may make most seats painfully confining, and any alteration that makes the character obviously more than human can hamper social interactions. In general, every two



obvious non-human options impose a +1 difficulty on all Social rolls, except those that are specifically intended to inspire fear or loathing.

An organism may include no more than 10 medical Advancement options in total.

| R&D | Option   |
|-----|--|
| 20  | muscle implantation (+1 Strength) (three level limit)                        |
| 40  | nerve tweaking (+1 Dexterity) (two level limit)                              |
| 20  | structural reinforcement (+1 Stamina) (three level limit)                    |
| 15  | sensory enhancement (+1 Perception) (three level limit)                      |
| 90  | brain augmentation (+1 Intelligence) (two level limit)                       |
| 90  | brain augmentation (+1 Wits) (two level limit)                               |
| 5   | plastic surgery (new face, same Appearance)                                  |
| 10  | plastic surgery (+1 Appearance) (three level limit)                          |
| 60  | pheromone implantation (+1 Manipulation) (two level limit)                   |
| 75  | lobotomatic behavioral modification (+1 Charisma) (two level limit)          |
| 20  | dermal thickening ([2/0] armor)  |
| 60  | subdermal chitin implantation ([1/3] armor)                                  |
| 120 | exoskeletal transplantation ([2/4] armor)                                    |
| 60  | minor animal transplant (surface, minimal connections — e.g., whiskers)      |
| 120 | intermediate animal transplant (surface, extensive connections — e.g., tail) |
| 240 | major animal transplant (internal, extensive connections — e.g., claws)      |

## Chemistry

Better living through chemistry! Enhancements to this field are as varied as the players and the Storyteller can conceive. Many accomplishments are pharmaceutical in nature, though Advanced chemistry can find uses in construction or destruction. It is possible to mass-produce Advanced compounds. A note to the wily Storyteller: Advanced drugs are no strangers to odd side-effects. Look at a list of possible problems that modern antibiotics can generate, and go from there — particularly if someone botches during the formulation (R&D) stage....

A compound may include no more than three chemistry Advancement options in total.

| R&D | Option  |
|-----|---|
| 5   | Attribute enhancement drug (+1 for one scene) (three level limit)         |
| 10  | reflex enhancement drug (+2 Initiative for one scene) (three level limit) |

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 20  | acid (3 dice lethal damage) (three level limit)                 |
| 20  | Advanced poisons (3 dice lethal damage) (three level limit)     |
| 25  | mind control drugs (reduce victim's Willpower by three points)  |
| 30  | silk-steel (clothes with [2/4, 0] armor protection)             |
| 40  | superfuel (10x fuel efficiency, +25% speed) (two level limit)   |
| 60  | concentrated explosives (+25% damage dice) (two level limit)    |
| 60  | Advanced alloys (half weight for metal items)                   |
| 60  | healing enhancement drug (heal lethal damage at bashing speeds) |
| 270 | anti-aging drugs (age one year per decade)                      |

## Innovative Super-Science

Innovations venture into an area untouched by Advancements. An Innovative invention is something that does not currently exist in our real world, it's the product of hypothetical science. It may include any of the options available to an Advancement, but an Innovation's main function is to channel Z-waves to produce an effect similar to those generated by Knacks. Put another way, Innovations duplicate Knack effects. All Innovations have the following Traits, each of which influences the difficulty of the initial Ability mastery roll and the time spent in R&D:

**Effect:** This Trait is the Knack equivalent that the invention produces (remember that an invention cannot reproduce Gadgeteer, Scientific Prodigy or Mad Scientist). A level one Knack takes 30 days; a level two Knack takes 60 days; a level three Knack takes 90 days. Consider all heroic Knacks level two for the purposes of determining invention costs. The Inspired are physiologically incapable of generating Knacks above level three, but with super-science, inventions can produce the equivalent of up to level five effects! (Refer to "Pushing the Envelope.") Making such an invention is no easy task: A level four Knack effect takes 120 days at +2 difficulty, and a level five Knack effect needs a whopping 200 days at +3 difficulty. Still, with time and Inspiration, all things are possible. A given invention can only produce one Knack effect.

**Dice Pool:** Use this pool when rolling the invention's Knack effect. The invention begins with a base dice pool equal to half what the user's would be if he had the Knack in question (rounded down). Refer to the specific Knack description to determine the appropriate dice pool. Each additional die up to what would be the character's equivalent dice pool adds three days to the R&D time. Each die past that, up to one-and-a-half times the character's equivalent dice pool (rounded up), takes nine more days and adds +1 difficulty to the Ability mastery roll.



**Secondary Function:** This Trait covers any non-Inspired options the invention might have. Choose from the Advance-ment options listed above and apply R&D times and difficulty modifiers as appropriate to the variables dictated by the Effect, above. An Innovative invention may have up to 10 options or the amount listed for the item type, above, whichever is less. Secondary functions do not require telluric energy to operate (see "Powering Innovations").

**Usability:** Inventions don't always have standardized controls — indeed, they're often too esoteric for a conventionally minded operator to comprehend. Any Innovation is automatically usable by its creator. With +1 difficulty to the initial R&D roll, the inventor can make the invention usable by any of his own type of Inspired character (mesmerist or stalwart). For +2 difficulty, the invention is usable by any type of Inspired. For +4 difficulty, even the un-Inspired can use the device, though this also requires a telluric energy source (see below). These difficulty ratings are not cumulative.

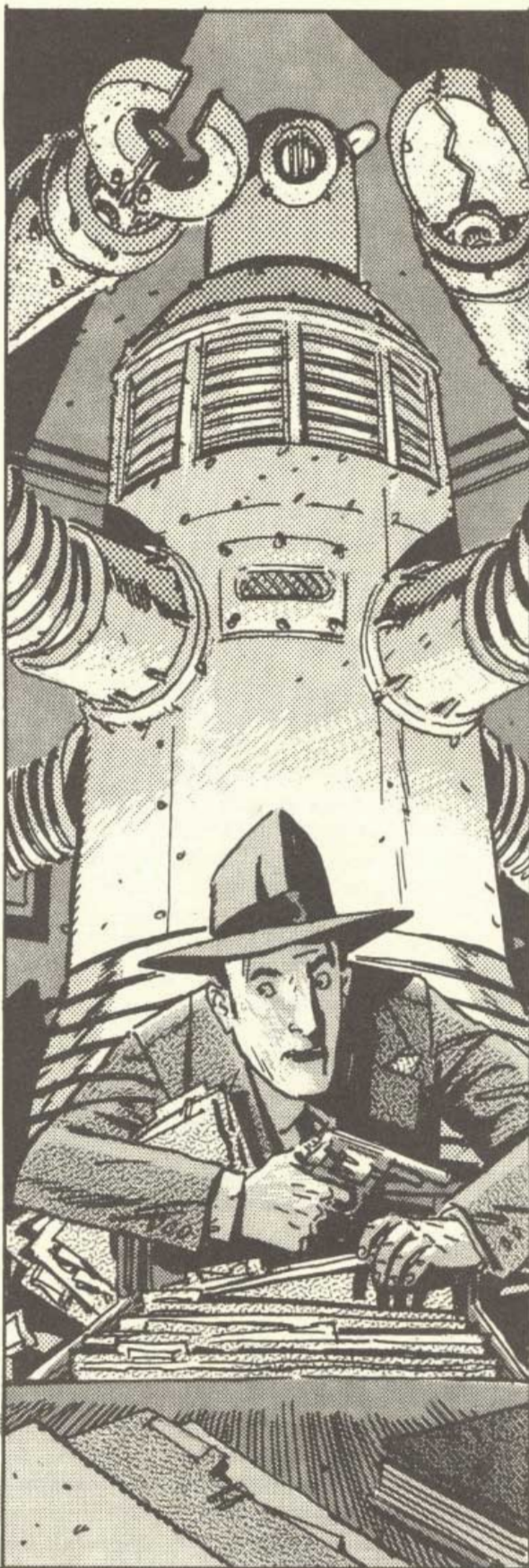
**Durability:** "Kick it and it'll start working again" isn't always the best solution. Each invention has a soak rating and health or structural levels equal to one less than those of its least durable material component (see p. 210). The inventor can increase this durability by applying +1 difficulty to the initial Ability mastery roll for each extra soak point or each extra health/structural level. Each score is restricted to twice its base rating.

**Warranty:** All Innovations have a base life expectancy, after which point they grow increasingly unreliable (a hallmark of super-science). Once the invention is constructed, the player rolls the Ability mastery Trait used in the initial R&D. The successes rolled indicate the number of months the invention functions reliably. At the end of this life expectancy, the invention has about a week of unreliable functionality left, sometime during which it fails at a dramatically appropriate moment (Storyteller's discretion). The inventor can increase this period of functionality by giving the invention an overhaul before its standard functionality expires (see "Rebuild," below).

To ensure an invention has an "unlimited" warranty — that it *always* runs smoothly (barring targeted damage or outright destruction, of course) — the inventor may spend one permanent Inspiration on his creation when it's built or during a rebuild period. (If applied to an invention made during character creation, the limit on the character's number of starting inventions is based on his Inspiration rating before that invention was made and does reduce his starting temporary Inspiration pool.)

### Rebuild

With a rebuild, the character completely disassembles and reassembles the invention, cleaning every part and replacing anything that's wearing out. The player makes a new Ability mastery roll, which starts its warranty afresh (see above). To maintain a sense of mystery about how well an invention truly functions, the Storyteller may make the roll and keep the results secret. A





complete rebuild takes roughly one-tenth the time it took to construct the invention in the first place and requires the same Inspiration expenditure. Obviously, the invention cannot be used while it's being rebuilt.

## Pushing the Envelope

At its most straightforward, an Innovation can duplicate the capabilities of any Knack (except Gadgeteer, Scientific Prodigy and Mad Scientist). That doesn't mean you can't also come up with new effects. With the Storyteller's input, players should feel free to design new effects for their inventions. It's a simple enough procedure on the surface: Decide on an interesting effect, determine the appropriate power level, then refer to "Effect," above, to find the R&D time needed and the difficulty involved in creating the invention.

Practically speaking, it can be difficult to decide whether an effect should be level one or level two — not to mention trying to decide what constitutes a theoretical level four and five capability! Unfortunately, we don't have the room to provide an extensive listing of effect choices. It falls to the player and the Storyteller to agree upon an effect's capabilities and level. The Storyteller has final say as to whether something is excessively (or inadequately) powerful. Likewise, she may suggest alternatives if the proposed power simply doesn't fit *Adventure's* rules or genre. The Storyteller may also flat-out disallow anything that the player can't adequately justify in terms of super-science. Converting powers should be a route to nifty effects and plot complications, not an excuse for building an über-powered mind-control/disintegration ray.

## Powering Innovations

An Innovation requires telluric energy (Inspiration) to function. An Inspired character who can operate the invention may spend her own Inspiration to power its effect, just like she would for a Knack. This act can be literally draining, though, so most inventors attach a telluric energy source to the invention. A telluric energy source has a unique resonant frequency and electromagnetic field that absorbs the ambient telluric radiation flowing through the entire known universe, which can power all manner of equipment. Artificial and natural cells are available (see below), though both are extremely rare. Size and mass are directly dependent on storage capac-

ity, as listed below:

| Capacity | Mass    | Size Equivalent    |
|----------|---------|--------------------|
| 1        | 100 g   | modern D cell      |
| 2        | 500 g   | modern soda can    |
| 5        | 2 kg    | gallon paint can   |
| 10       | 10 kg   | five-gallon bucket |
| 25       | 250 kg  | 55-gallon drum     |
| 50       | 2 tons  | small car          |
| 75       | 5 tons  | large truck        |
| 100      | 20 tons | small house        |

To "tap" a cell, a character attaches a pair of shielded cables between the Innovative invention and the cell's terminals. Raw crystals must be shaped to accommodate attaching an appropriate conducting cable, typically by carving knobs around which to wrap the cable or holes to act as sockets. If not done correctly, these alterations can create a flaw in the crystal that allows the stored telluric energy to dissipate at the rate of one charge roughly every 24 hours. Further, the flawed crystal will not recharge. Once hooked up properly, the battery takes a few minutes to warm up — more or less for dramatic effect at the Storyteller's discretion. It can then be used to power the invention just like an Inspired character normally would — by spending a point from the battery instead of from the character's own stash. Recharging a cell is described below.

## Dixon Batteries

Professor Franklin Dixon developed the telluric-ionic power cell, a crystalline lattice suspended in a metallic ion solution and housed inside an aluminum casing. Constructed properly, the so-called "telion cell" or "Dixon battery" can store limited quantities of Z-wave energy. Dixon distributed the knowledge necessary for the cells creation to the adventuring community after his ex-wife, Hephaestia Geary-Wexler, absconded with the blueprints following one of their infrequent attempts at reconciliation.

Constructing even the smallest battery is an expensive proposition, primarily due to the scarcity of materials required to make the lattice. Making a 5-charge power cell requires Resources 4; a 25-charge battery requires Resources 5; a 50-charge cell requires Wealth Beyond Avarice. Larger telion cells are beyond the financial capacity of any private individual. Once the proper materials are assembled, making a Dixon battery is no more difficult than any other super-science procedure. It requires no R&D so long as the inventor has a complete and accurate copy of Professor Dixon's schematics. Construction time requires four hours of work per point of capacity (the work may be split between multiple personnel). However, a Dixon battery is "flat" when constructed, lacking any etheric juice. (See below for details on charging.)

## Telluric Energy Crystals

There are also natural repositories of telluric energy. The Z-wave cascade from the Hammersmith event flowed through living tissue and inanimate forms alike. The former



became Inspired; the latter were transformed in their own way. Some areas gave rise to hidden lands, while others became infused with the... potential... for Inspiration, if you will. Concentrated telluric energy dissipated quickly from most substances; only crystals seemed to have the right structure to retain Z-wave energy for longer periods. Certain precious stones and crystals store telluric energy even years after the seminal event, awaiting only their discovery and use by the Inspired. Such crystals are even more rare than Dixon batteries — due not only to their physical scarcity but also because they are typically found in or near the hard-to-find hidden lands.

## Recharging Telluric Energy Sources

Not surprisingly, these energy sources are much sought after by those who create and use Innovations. Even if they were easy to mass-produce — which they aren't — these cells would never find widespread use due to one major factor: Once the stored energy is spent, the cell may only be recharged with an infusion of Inspiration. If left immobile, a telluric energy source draws upon ambient telluric energy, regaining one charge every 24 hours until it reaches its capacity. A cell does not lose charges if moved; it simply remains in its current state.

Siphoning a character's Inspiration also recharges a cell. This process involves hooking an Inspired character to a telluric capture invention — typically a large, ominous looking chair with lots of wires and tubes coming out of it. A set of electrodes attaches to the character's forehead, and shielded power cables run into the invention. The character controlling the capture device regulates how much of the donor's Inspiration is transferred. The rate of exchange depends on who's in the chair. The invention's own creator can restore three charges per point of Inspiration he loses. Another Inspired character of the same type as the creator restores two charges per Inspiration point. An Inspired character of a different type as the creator restores one charge per Inspiration point. If an un-Inspired character is in the chair, or if an Inspired character has no Inspiration left, the chair leeches away his very life energy — one bashing health level per charge! There is no known way an Inspired character can siphon Inspiration from a telluric cell. To date, all such attempts have ended messily.

## Super-Science Examples

Wow, making inventions involves a lot of math! Let's see how it all fits together:

### Example #1

Taken by the awesome might and stylish flair of Doctor Zorbo's zeppelin armada, eccentric millionaire Steve MacFadden commissions Professor Sears to build him a zeppelin yacht. Told to spare no expense, the Professor designs accordingly, choosing to enhance a Grumman Pegasus Express airframe (a small dirigible vehicle type). Since the basic airframe design already

exists — and, more importantly, he's not adding any Knacks — the Professor is making an Advancement.

Professor Sears decides to start with the easy stuff such as internal layout before getting into the tricky bits. The table in the Appendix doesn't list cargo capacities for vehicles, but the Storyteller decides that a small dirigible can handle up to 100 tons of cargo. MacFadden rarely travels with that much baggage, so the Professor leaves the zeppelin's lifting capabilities alone. MacFadden and his household staff intend to use the sky yacht for transatlantic trips, so the zeppelin must have living quarters. What with the existing design and plenty of cargo space to work with, the yacht receives six luxury suites: MacFadden's, his wife's and space for four guests. The 20-man staff and crew must make do with regular living quarters. These options require a total of 28 days' worth of design time: 18 for the six luxury suites and 10 for the five 4-person bunkrooms. MacFadden also wants a duplicate of his home office; this will take approximately the same room as another luxury bedroom, adding another three days. Finally, the Professor adds a garage for MacFadden's touring car and a small stable for his pair of Arabian stallions. The garage is a vehicle support facility, and the stable requires about the same amount of space, for 40 more days' worth of design time.

Involving an initial time frame of 71 days, these designs will take a while, but won't be terribly difficult to create. This is especially true since the Professor has four skilled lab assistants. Three of them have three dots in Engineering; the fourth has three dots and is a stalwart. Not only that, but the savvy Professor has the Scientific Prodigy Knack. Together, they give the Professor a very respectable nine dice to add to his Engineering 10 dice pool. The Professor's player rolls only nine successes on 19 dice. Since he only needed one success to make a workable design, the remaining successes reduce the final R&D time to 63 days.

MacFadden brings in a crew to install the cabins and other interior components (which will take roughly a month based on the construction time on p. 178). The Storyteller decides this requires skilled supervision. Professor Sears wants to continue with the zeppelin designs, and the Storyteller agrees that one of his lab assistants can supervise the interior upgrades. That means the Professor loses that assistant's aid for the next month while he turns his attention on the zeppelin's performance capabilities.

Sears thinks the zeppelin should be as agile as possible. Adding +5 maneuver will require 50 days' worth of R&D and apply +4 difficulty to the R&D roll. The Professor considers adding significant combat capabilities to the airship, but MacFadden feels confident that he's safe from direct attacks. Muttering something about fools rushing into places, the Professor nixes the fore and aft 3" gun mounts and battleship plating but sneaks a quartet of .50 machine guns into the design — just in case. Since this only adds four days to the design time (and no



increased difficulty!), he decides to conceal each weapon behind pop-open teak paneling at an increase of another four days in total.

The Professor is at a predicted 58 days before performing actual R&D. He wants to be done with the additional designs by the time the construction crew is finished, so he locks himself in the lab for the entire time (shaving off 19 days). His player lost two dice when his assistant left for the construction job, so he has a total Ability master dice pool of 17. This is nothing to sneeze at, as he proves by getting 10 successes! He reduces this by five to succeed in the designs, the remaining five reducing the final tally to 34 days in the lab. The construction crew has a few days off before the Professor presents his new designs.

## Example #2

Professor Sears decides that an invention capable of generating effects similar to those of the Human Firebrand is just what he needs for personal protection. He calls his research team to the lab to draw up the plans for the Man-Portable Spontaneous Thermal Projection Engine. This invention falls under the rules for an Innovation; the variables are as follows:

**Effect:** Flame Conjuring, a level two psychic Knack (initial R&D time of 60 days).

**Dice Pool:** Flame Conjuring has two separate applications, one using Willpower and the other Awareness. The Storyteller calls for an average of the two pools for simplicity's sake. The average is 5 for Professor Sears, making the invention's dice pool two dice. The Professor considers this blatantly unacceptable and increases it to the maximum: one and a half times his dice pool, or eight dice. This increase adds 36 days to the initial R&D time (three days each for dice three through five, nine days each for dice six through eight). It also adds +3 difficulty to the Ability mastery roll for the three dice boost to dice pool 8.

**Secondary Function:** None.

**Usability:** An associate points out that it might be useful to hand the thing off to a more able-bodied combatant. The Professor agrees but, in the interests of

safety, restricts its use only to the Inspired. Expanding the range of users from the designer himself to all Inspired characters adds +2 difficulty to the initial Ability mastery roll.

**Durability:** Professor Sears doesn't think the invention will encounter any situations that physically threaten it, so he leaves its soak rating and structural levels alone.

Professor Sears' player is now ready to roll for R&D. The initial research time stands at 96 days. That's a long time, and with the difficulty involved, he probably won't have a lot of successes handy to shorten the duration. The Professor decides he spends a total of 30 days "locked in the lab," thereby shaving 10 days off the initial time. He doesn't bother spending Inspiration to further reduce this time.

Time isn't really the problem, though, it's the +5 difficulty penalty on the Ability mastery roll! Luckily, Sears still has his four trusty lab assistants. The Professor's player again has 19 dice in his Ability mastery pool. He must roll at least six successes to create the Thermal Projection Engine; any extra successes beyond this will reduce his R&D time. After much tossing of dice, the Professor's player tallies up 14 successes! Subtracting six to make the R&D roll leaves him with eight successes he can apply to the initial R&D time, knocking the result to 78 days. The Professor researches for almost three months and is locked in the lab for roughly half that time.

**Warranty:** Once the design is completed, the final R&D time places its subsequent construction time in the "one month" range. Professor Sears is more concerned about the invention's reliability in the field. He doesn't want to lose a permanent Inspiration making sure it never breaks down, though, and figures he's bound to get a nice long run out of the thing with his massive 19 dice Ability mastery pool. The Storyteller decides to make the roll just to mess with the Professor's player and secretly gets nine successes. The Thermal Projection Engine will run just fine for nine months before it experiences any problems.



# CHAPTER

## DRAMA

### SIX

Adventure wouldn't be pulp without a healthy dose of over-the-top action and derring-do, and that often involves dice rolling. Chapter One's rules are designed to streamline this process so that you can pay attention to the story. To assist you and the Storyteller further, this chapter covers additional dice mechanics, including dramatic feats, dramatic editing, combat, damage and recovery. These systems are just suggestions; if you come up with a way you like better, use it in your story. Also — particularly when dealing with social situations such as seductions and speeches — the dice should never get in the way of roleplaying. If a player has his character make a particularly inspired (or painful) speech, deliver an especially smooth (or cheesy) line or come up with a brilliant (or laughable) alibi, feel free to let the character succeed (or fail) automatically, regardless of what the dice and Traits say.

## Dramatic Feats

Dramatic feats aren't to be confused with dramatic editing (which is covered later in this chapter). These systems simplify the Storyteller's job by supplying rules for a number of common activities. The appropriate Ability dice pool is bracketed after the feat in question in each case. If your character has a specialty well suited to a given task, you may add that die to your dice pool. Storytellers should, and will undoubtedly have to, invent their own dramatic feats for new situations. Bear in mind that characters lacking a specific Ability may default to the Attribute on which the Ability is based, unless stated otherwise.

## Automatic Feats

Automatic feats require your character to take an action, but don't involve a die roll under most circumstances. The following are common automatic feats.

- **Activate Knack:** Triggering certain Inspired powers or a super-science device may not require a dice roll. See individual descriptions for details.
- **Get Up:** Your character may rise from the ground in one turn without making a roll. If he wishes to get to his feet while doing something else in the same turn, he must take a multiple action (p. 201) with a standard Athletics roll to rise successfully.
- **Move:** Your character may walk, run or sprint. If walking, he moves at (Dexterity + 2) meters in one turn. If running, he moves (Dexterity + 12) meters per turn. If

sprinting, he moves  $([Dexterity \times 3] + 20)$  meters per turn. If your character has Athletics 1, he knows how to swim. Swimming is equal to your character's walking speed plus one meter per dot in the Athletics Ability.

Your character may move up to half maximum running speed and then attack or perform another action (see p. 201 for particulars). He may also move *while* taking another action; each meter moved subtracts one from the other action's dice pool. Moving under hazardous conditions (combat, rough terrain) may call for an Athletics roll, and injured characters (p. 207) cannot move at maximum speed.

- **Ready Weapon:** This can involve drawing a blade or reloading a gun with prepared rounds. No roll is needed in most cases, so long as your character takes no other action that turn. If he wishes to ready a weapon while doing something else in the same turn, he must take a multiple action (p. 201) with a standard Archery, Firearms or Melee roll (as appropriate) for the readying attempt.

- **Start a Vehicle:** This takes an action, but normally requires no roll.

- **Yield:** You allow the character with the next-highest initiative (p. 178) to act. Your character may still act at the end of the turn. If all characters (player and Storyteller) yield, no one does anything that turn.

## Physical Feats

These systems cover tasks involving the three Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina). These feats typically require a dice roll.

- **Balance/Footing [Athletics, Martial Arts]:** In pulp, the hero often ends up scrambling after the villain along the slick canvas atop a dirigible or facing a treacherous leap while the cave floor shakes from an earthquake. No roll is required if your character has the time to advance slowly or grab suitable support to keep his feet. When the moment requires decisive action, roll Athletics or Martial Arts. Difficulty applies based on the circumstances: A minor problem (slight tremor, floor at 5 percent incline or less) requires a standard roll; a serious hindrance (rotted floorboards, up to a 20 percent grade) applies +1 difficulty; a significant challenge (floor literally falling apart, up to a 45 percent grade) applies +2 difficulty or more. The Storyteller may declare this as a reflexive action, so the roll for balance doesn't count as an action for the turn. If the character is at the epicenter of an earthquake, though, he's likely doing everything he can just to keep his feet.



• **Climbing [Athletics]:** When your character climbs an inclined surface (rocky slope, stack of shipping crates or building), roll Athletics. For an average climb with available handholds and nominal complications, your character moves three meters per success. The Storyteller adjusts this distance based on the climb's difficulty (easier: four meters per success; more difficult: two meters per success). The number of handholds, smoothness of the surface and, to a lesser extent, weather can all affect the rate of travel. A short, difficult climb may have the same difficulty as a long, easy climb. Equipment such as mountain-climbing gear or a special Z-wave device may also come into play. The extended action lasts until your character accumulates enough successes to reach the desired height. On a mild botch of one or two 1s, your character may only slip or get stuck; on a more severe botch of three or more 1s, he may fall!

• **Encumbrance [Might]:** The Storyteller should make life difficult for players whose characters have extensive equipment and weaponry lists. A character without enhancements from Knacks or super-science can carry/tote 10 kilograms (22 pounds) per dot in his Might dice pool without penalty. A character exceeding this total suffers +1 difficulty to all actions involving physical skills due to the added weight. Also, for every 10 kg over the allocation, your character's base movement drops by one meter. If the total weight carried is double his Might allocation, your character can't move. This system is a guideline; the Storyteller should not call for an inventory check every time your character picks up a pen.

• **Feats of Endurance [Endurance]:** Endurance determines how well and for how long your character can run beyond his normal capacity, stay awake after a day of activity or hold his breath for an abnormally long time. Sustaining such acts requires Endurance rolls, with a frequency ranging from every hour for trying to stay awake, each half-hour or so for maintaining physical activity or every few seconds to keep holding one's breath. The Storyteller should add one to the difficulty (cumulative) to each subsequent roll after the first to reflect the increasing strain on your character's vitality. Botches should suit the feat attempted (e.g., stumbling, reflexively gasping for air, nodding off, lunging for the nearest available food).

• **Intrusion [Legerdemain, Stealth]:** Intrusion covers breaking and entering, avoiding security devices, picking locks — and preventing others from doing the same. When bypassing active security (guards, tripwires), your character must succeed on the first attempt; failure reveals his presence (being seen, triggering an alarm). Your character may try dealing with passive security (locks, secret panels) multiple times without giving himself away (see "Second Chances," p. 113). Intrusion rolls are usually standard actions, but they may become difficult actions depending on the security (the Storyteller decides the difficulty). On a botch, the clumsy break-in attempt goes horribly awry.

Setting up security measures is a standard action, but multiple successes achieved in the effort increase the

quality of security (adding to the difficulty to breach it). On a botch, your character forgets to attach the tripwires to the alarm or leaves some other gap in the defenses.

• **Jumping [Athletics]:** Leaping under two meters across or a half-meter high doesn't require a roll. For larger distances or suitably dramatic situations, each success on an Athletics roll launches your character another half-meter vertically or one meter horizontally. To jump successfully, a character must clear more distance than the span between him and his destination. On a failure, the character doesn't clear the required distance, but a reflexive Athletics roll lets him grab onto a ledge or other safety as he falls. On a botch, your character may trip over his own feet, leap right into a wall or fall to his doom. You may roll Awareness before the jump to gauge exactly how far the character must leap (i.e., how many successes you need).

• **Lifting [Might]:** The chart below lists the minimum Might dice pool for deadlifting various weights without a roll. Picking something up is different from carrying it (see Encumbrance, above).

| Might Dice Pool | Mass (kg) | Example                  |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| 1               | 15        | Toss a wooden chair      |
| 2               | 45        |                          |
| 3               | 100       | Lift a grown person      |
| 4               | 165       |                          |
| 5               | 240       | Topple a shipping crate  |
| 6               | 300       |                          |
| 7               | 360       | Heft a full steel drum   |
| 8               | 420       |                          |
| 9               | 480       | Lift one end of a girder |
| 10              | 550       |                          |

A character may try to affect a heavier weight than his rating allows. Roll Willpower at +3 difficulty; each success advances the character one level on the chart. The Storyteller may raise your character's effective Might if he only wants to drag something a short distance instead of pick it up. Characters can also work together to lift an object (see "Teamwork," p. 113). Lifting is all or nothing — if you fail the roll, nothing happens. On a botch, your character may strain something or drop the object on his own foot.

• **Opening/Closing [Might]:** Opening a door with brute force calls for a Might roll. A standard interior door requires only one success to bash open or slam shut. A reinforced door generally takes five successes. A vault door might take 10 or more successes (if it's possible to budge at all). These successes may be handled as an extended action. While teamwork is possible (and recommended for heavier doors), a single individual can open a door through repeated hammering. No force is needed if the door isn't held in some way. A botch inflicts a health level of bashing damage to your character's shoulder (or whatever portion of his body he flung against the door). Certain portals (metal vault doors, stone temple doors) may require a Might minimum to even attempt.



## • Pursuit [Animal Handling, Athletics, Drive, Pilot]:

Catching someone who's trying desperately to avoid your character involves several different rolls. If one party is significantly faster than and/or farther away from the other (higher movement rate or faster vehicle or a helluva running start), the Storyteller may declare that party outstrips the other one without extended drama. If the getaway is in doubt, resolve pursuit as an extended action.

The target starts with a number of additional dice based on her distance from pursuers: one for every two meters ahead of pursuers on foot or one for every 10 meters ahead of pursuers in vehicles or on mounts. Exceptionally long foot or mounted chases might involve Endurance tests, and long vehicle chases may factor in fuel consumption. Dice may also apply if one party is significantly faster than the other. For foot pursuit, add one die for every two meters' worth of movement rate difference. For vehicular pursuit, add one for every 10 kph worth of difference.

The target and the pursuers roll the appropriate Ability dice pool (depending on the type of pursuit) each turn, adding new successes to any rolled in previous turns. (The further the quarry distances herself from pursuit, the more dice her player rolls and the more quickly she might get away. The reverse is also true if the pursuer closes the gap.) If the pursuer accumulates more total successes than the target, he catches up to his quarry. As the target accumulates successes, she gains distance from her pursuers and may use that lead to lose her opponents. Each success that the quarry accumulates beyond the pursuers' total acts as

+1 difficulty to any Awareness rolls pursuers must make to remain on the target's tail. If the quarry botches, she stumbles or ends up at a dead end.

The Storyteller may call for pursuers to roll Awareness at any time (although not more than once per turn). On a failure, the target is considered to have slipped away (into the crowd, around a bend, into a cloud bank). On a botch, the target vanishes immediately.

• **Resistance [Resistance]:** The health chart on your character sheet normally declares the number of dice you lose from dice pools as your character takes damage. You may roll Resistance once each turn; a successful roll restores a number of dice to your pool equal to your Resistance Ability (*not* dice pool). The restored dice last for as many turns as successes you roll. This benefit requires the Resistance Ability; it cannot be performed as a default task.

• **Riding/Driving/Piloting [Animal Handling, Drive, Pilot]:** Under normal circumstances you need not roll Drive or Pilot for your character to steer a vehicle or Animal Handling for your character to guide an animal — assuming your character has the appropriate Ability. Bad weather, the vehicle or mount's speed, obstacles and the performance of complex maneuvers can challenge even the most competent drivers. Specific difficulties are up to the Storyteller. For example, driving in heavy rain increases the difficulty by one; going fast while also trying to shake a bunch of goons off the running boards jumps the penalty up three. Similarly, piloting an autogyro





through artillery fire is +1, but trying to reach a specific landing point while avoiding pursuit bumps it to +3. A failed roll indicates trouble, requiring an additional roll to avoid crashing or losing control. Players of characters in control of a vehicle or an animal who have no dots in the appropriate Ability must roll for almost every change in course or procedure. On a botch, the vehicle or mount may get out of control or worse.

- **Shadowing [Stealth]:** Shadowing someone requires that your character keep tabs on the target without necessarily catching her — and while not being noticed by her! The target's player can roll Awareness whenever she has a chance to spot her tail (the Storyteller decides when such an opportunity arises); the pursuer opposes this attempt with a Stealth roll. The target must get at least one more success than her shadow does in order to spot the tail; if she succeeds, she may act accordingly. This resisted action is handled individually for each person shadowing the target (if the target is being followed by three people, her player makes three separate Awareness rolls, one against each target's Stealth roll).

- **Sneaking [Stealth]:** A sneaking character uses Stealth as a resisted action against Awareness rolls from anyone able to detect his passing. Unless observers receive more successes than the sneaking character does, he passes undetected. Noise, unsecured gear, tripwires, lack of cover or large groups of observers can increase Stealth difficulty. Super-science security devices or superior vantage points may add dice to Awareness rolls. On a botch, the character stumbles into one of the people he's avoiding, accidentally triggers an alarm or performs some other obvious act.

- **Swimming [Endurance]:** Swimming in the short term requires Athletics (see p. 138). Long-distance or -duration swimming requires successful Endurance rolls. The first roll, requiring one success, is necessary only after the first half-hour of sustained activity. A cumulative difficulty penalty of one applies for each subsequent half-hour. You may lower the difficulty on the next attempt by one if you get three or more successes on a roll. If a roll fails, your character tires; he may float, but he's too exhausted to swim. He can rest by floating, but the difficulty doesn't drop until he can get to solid ground and recuperate. On a botch, your character sinks and, if he doesn't have an air supply, begins to drown (see p. 210).

- **Throwing [Athletics, Might]:** Your character can throw objects (*grenades, knives*) with a mass of one kilogram or less a distance of (Might dice pool x 5) meters. For each additional kilogram of mass that an object has, this distance decreases by five meters (heavy objects don't go as far). As long as the object's mass doesn't reduce throwing distance to zero, your character can easily grab and throw. A character with a Might dice pool of 5 can throw a 1 kg object 25 meters, a 2 kg object 20 meters and a 5 kg object five meters. If your character can lift something but its mass reduces throwing distance

to zero, the object can be hurled aside at best — about one meter's distance. If an object can't be lifted, it can't be thrown (refer instead to "Lifting," above).

Throwing an object accurately requires a standard Athletics roll to half maximum range. Throwing from half maximum to maximum range adds +1 difficulty. The Storyteller may reduce throwing distances for particularly unwieldy objects or increase them for aerodynamic ones. Wind conditions may also play a factor. On a botch, your character may drop the object or strike a companion with it.

## Mental Feats

These systems cover tasks involving the three Mental Attributes (Perception, Intelligence, Wits). Mental tests can give you information about things your character knows but you, the player, don't. Still, you should depend on creativity when solving problems — not on dice rolling.

- **Invent [Engineering, Medicine, Science]:** Your character can try to create a new device or cobble together existing equipment to perform a new task. Chapter Five: Super-Science has extensive rules on inventing.

- **Investigation [Investigation]:** Any search for clues, evidence or hidden contraband requires Investigation. The Storyteller may add a difficulty to investigations involving obscure clues or particularly well-concealed objects. One success reveals basic details; multiple successes provide detailed information and may even make deductions possible based on physical evidence. On a botch, your character may miss or accidentally destroy obvious clues.

- **Navigation [Navigation]:** Your character can try to determine his location and/or chart a course to a desired destination. This can be as simple as finding his way around a city or as hazardous as traveling safely through the uncharted Sahara. The Storyteller determines any difficulty, with successes rolled indicating the degree of accuracy — one success gets your character from A to B sooner or later, five successes enables him to navigate by the safest and most direct route. A compass, map, sextant or other equipment may reduce difficulties or even provide your character with additional dice to the roll. On a botch, your character strikes out in entirely the wrong direction.

- **Observation [Awareness]:** This feat involves picking a face out of a crowd, keeping an eye on someone and being aware of one's surroundings. This covers anything that doesn't require specific training in observation, as Investigation does. Observation is often used in resisted rolls against feats such as sneaking.

- **Repair [Engineering]:** Before repairing a device that's on the fritz, your character must identify its problems (accomplished as a standard research roll). The Storyteller then sets any difficulty to the repair roll, depending on the problem's severity, whether the proper tools or any replacement parts are on hand and if adverse conditions exist. Changing a tire is a standard action, while re-routing power through a secondary system is more diffi-



cult. Even a basic effort takes at least a few turns to complete; more complex work is an extended action that lasts 10 minutes per success needed (repairing vehicles follows the chart on p. 256). On a botch, your character may simply waste time and a new part or may make the problem worse.

• **Research [Academics, Engineering, Medicine, Science]:** Your character performs research when searching libraries for historical facts, when looking for obscure references in ancient texts or when trying to learn a device's function or origin. In all cases, the number of successes achieved determines the amount of information discovered; one success gives you at least basic information, while extra successes provide more details. The Storyteller may apply difficulties for particularly obscure data. On a botch, your character may not find anything, or he may uncover completely erroneous information.

• **Tracking [Awareness, Survival]:** Unlike shadowing, tracking requires your character to follow physical evidence to find a target. Discovered footprints, broken twigs, blood trails or other physical signs lead the tracker right to the subject. Following such a trail is a standard action; multiple successes provide extra information (subject's rate of speed, estimated weight, number of people tracked). The quarry can cover his tracks with a successful Survival roll; each success modifies tracking difficulties by one. Inclement weather, poor tracking conditions (city streets, open sea) and a shortage of time also add to tracking difficulty. On a botch, your character loses the trail and may even destroy the physical signs of passage.

## Social Feats

These systems cover tasks involving the three Social Attributes (Appearance, Manipulation, Charisma). Roleplaying usually supercedes any Social Ability roll, for better or worse. Storytellers may ignore Social Feats when a player exhibits particularly good or excruciatingly bad roleplaying.

• **Carousing [Savvy, Style]:** Your character influences others to relax and have fun. This might be used to show a potential client a good time, loosen an informant's tongue or make instant drinking buddies who'll come to your aid when a brawl starts. It's a standard action when dealing with an individual; difficulties may apply for large or ambivalent groups. On a botch, your character comes off as an obnoxious boor, if not worse.

• **Credibility [Subterfuge]:** Subterfuge is used when perpetrating a scam or trying to detect one (a scam can range from impersonating the authorities to using a forged passport). All parties involved, whether detecting the lie or perpetrating it, roll Subterfuge. The scam's "marks" must roll higher than the perpetrator to detect any deception. Convincing false credentials and other props may add to the difficulty of uncovering the dupe, while teamwork may help reveal the scam. On a botch, the entire plan falls apart.

• **Disguise [Disguise]:** Disguise requires a combina-

tion of improvisation and physical believability. A burly man can easily pose as a dock worker, but passing as a nun is quite a bit more difficult. The role assumed and the resources on hand dictate any difficulty of the Disguise roll. A standard roll is suitable if your character simply wants to look like someone other than himself and has a decent change of clothes and props on hand. Passing for a specific person is more difficult, especially if your character had limited interaction with the person before assuming the role. Spending a great deal of time with the subject and having ample wardrobe, makeup and props mitigate the difficulty. The Storyteller should also take roleplaying into account. A marginal disguise may succeed if the player does an impressive imitation, while even the most inspired disguise is ineffectual if the player acts no differently than usual. On a botch, the disguise is clearly not convincing.

• **Fast-Talk [Savvy, Subterfuge]:** When there's no time for subtlety, bluster. A target can be overwhelmed with a rapid succession of almost-believable half-truths. Hopefully, the subject believes anything she hears just to get away from the chatter — or becomes so annoyed that she ignores your character completely. Trying to fast-talk someone is a resisted action — your character's dice pool against the target's Willpower. Whoever scores more successes wins. On a tie, more bluster is needed. On a botch, your character goes too far, rambling without effect and angering the target.

• **Interrogation [Interrogation]:** Peaceful interrogation involves applying strategic queries designed to reveal specific facts. This is a resisted action between your character's Interrogation and the subject's Willpower. Rolls are made at key points during questioning or at the end of an interrogation session.

In violent interrogation, the victim is tortured mentally or physically to reveal what she knows. This is a resisted action between your character's Interrogation and the target's Resistance or Willpower (whichever is higher), rolled with each query. With each resisted action, the subject loses one current Willpower point for mental torture or one health level for physical torture. Damage inflicted depends on the tools used — fire and electricity cause lethal damage; punches and kicks cause bashing damage. The combination of physical and mental torture can be devastating. A botched Interrogation roll can destroy the subject's body or mind.

Whatever the interrogation method used, if you roll more successes in the resisted action, the target divulges something for each extra success rolled. If your extra successes exceed the victim's Willpower score, she folds completely and reveals all she knows. The Storyteller decides the extent and relevancy of information (details are often skewed to reflect what the subject knows or by what she thinks her interrogator wants to hear).

• **Intimidation [Intimidation]:** Intimidation has several applications. Its passive effect has no roll; it simply





gives your character plenty of space. The higher his Intimidation dice pool, the wider the berth that others give him. Intimidation's active application works through subtlety or outright threat. Subtlety is based on a perceived threat (losing one's job, going on report, suffering to loved ones in the future). Roll Intimidation in a resisted action against the subject's Willpower; the target must get more successes or be cowed effectively. Blatant intimidation involves direct physical threat. In this case, you may pair Intimidation with Strength in a resisted roll against the subject's Willpower. On a botch, your character looks ridiculous and doesn't impress anyone for the rest of the scene.

- **Oration [Perform]:** From a general's rousing speech to a politician's slick double-talk, the capacity to sway the masses emotionally creates and destroys empires. Roll Perform when your character speaks publicly, whether to a small board meeting or to the Senate. The Storyteller may increase the difficulty for a huge, dispassionate or openly hostile audience. Oration is hit or miss — your character either succeeds or fails. On a botch, she may damage her reputation or even be assaulted by the audience.

- **Performance [Perform]:** Perform can be used to impress an audience or to pay the bills. As with oration, the audience's mood can increase the difficulty, as can the performance's complexity. One success indicates an enjoyable if uninspired effort, while additional successes make the show a truly memorable event to even the surliest crowd.

On a botch, your character forgets lines or makes a gaffe.

- **Seduction [Etiquette, Savvy, Style, Subterfuge]:**

Seduction is a resisted action; the situation and method determines which Ability to use. In pleasant, cultured circumstances, roll Etiquette. In a seedy underbelly bar, use Savvy. Style encompasses any attempt to physically attract an individual or even a group. Roll Subterfuge when your character makes a seduction attempt through exaggeration or fabrication. The target rolls Willpower. If you get more successes, the target is interested (the degree depends on the number of extra successes rolled). Otherwise, the subject hasn't bitten yet, but your character may try again (although at an increased difficulty). On a botch, your character ends up with a drink in his face (at best).

- **Staredown [Intimidation]:** In the pulp genre, one of a character's most useful weapons is nothing more than a tough look. With the proper attitude, a confident adventurer can force even the most massive thug to back down. Each participant rolls Intimidation in an extended action. The one who first accumulates successes equal to his opponent's Wits +5 is the winner, forcing the other to look away. The player of the other character can spend a Willpower point each turn to keep glaring, but she will run out of Willpower eventually. The character who loses a staredown is cowed and cannot act directly against the winner for the remainder of the scene. Note that a proper staredown requires full concentration from all parties. If significant action breaks out around them, each character's player must make a successful Willpower roll to stay focused. If one fails, he automatically loses the staredown. If both fail, it's considered a draw.



## Dramatic Editing

The one constant among all Inspired characters, be they daredevils, mesmerists or stalwarts, is their uncanny luck. When circumstances seem darkest, the Inspired character finds an opportunity that a lesser individual would have missed, seizes that chance and runs with it. Whether it's discovering a lost scroll in a well-explored archaeological site or learning the hostile cannibal tribe worships a god whose name sounds just like the character's own, this luck is the one thing that, above all else, defines the heroes and villains of *Adventure*. Awe-inspiring powers are all well and good, but fortune favors the Inspired.

The game mechanic that represents this uncanny luck is called *dramatic editing*. In short, dramatic editing allows a player to spend Inspiration to insert details specific to his character into the scene, *as long as the Storyteller approves of it and it does not contradict anything that's already been established*. Dramatic editing departs from the usual conventions of roleplaying, in which the player controls his character's actions in the game but cannot dictate how his character is acted upon. It does not allow the player to supersede the Storyteller's descriptions of the scene, but rather to supplement them for purposes of heightening the story.

## The Parameters

Dramatic editing costs Inspiration to use. How much depends on what you want to accomplish, as outlined in "Cause and Effect," below. Regardless of the specific effect desired, all dramatic editing abides by the same overall parameters. Note: All Inspired adventurers, whether player or Storyteller characters, may use dramatic editing (except in the case of the cliffhanger, below). The Storyteller is encouraged to do so sparingly, though, since the deck is already stacked in her favor by the nature of her role in the game.

- **Believability:** The result of dramatic editing must be something that could conceivably occur within the setting and the events of the story. If the Storyteller doesn't see how a proposed dramatic edit could realistically occur, she is free to demand clarification from the player. This serves to maintain suspension of disbelief and encourages players to think of dramatic editing opportunities that keep the tone of the game. Finding six pristine sets of jungle survival gear in the vine-covered ruins of a Mayan temple isn't very believable. However, finding them in the decaying hulk of an Army Air Corps transport that crashed near the temple a decade ago is lot more plausible (and could give rise to further plot ideas). Likewise, buying passage out of Hong Kong on a Soviet nuclear ballistic missile sub is out of the question, since there aren't any Soviet nuclear subs in the pulp era. However, if the submarine is a prototype German U-boat whose crew mutinied and turned privateer, the trip becomes more likely.

- **Consistency:** The dramatic edit may not contradict anything that's already been established or overrule

the results of a dice roll that's already occurred *unless the dramatic editing is being performed for the explicit purpose of saving a player character from certain death*. If the Storyteller has already stated that a supply locker is completely empty, the player may not use dramatic editing to say, "hey, I found two Thompson guns and 12 pounds of gold coins in this supply locker!" However, if some palooka shoots the hero for 10 health levels of damage, the player may use dramatic editing to say (assuming the hero isn't utterly naked), "Fortunately, the bullet ricochets from my character's St. Christopher medallion! He's knocked unconscious, but he's not dead! Whew!"

Along similar lines, dramatic editing may not be used to contradict or negate someone else's Inspiration use in the scene. This covers everything from powering a Knack to other dramatic editing uses, and applies equally to other players' characters and to the Storyteller's villains.

- **Luck, Not Skill:** Dramatic editing is a function of the player's self-motivation, not the character's. Under no circumstances should the character — or any other character — be aware that dramatic editing has just occurred. Dramatic editing is an out-of-game way to explain and facilitate within a game setting the incredible surprises and amazing coincidences common to the pulp genre. It's *not* a reality-altering power within the setting that characters consciously, or even unconsciously, wield. Although his Inspiration powers the dramatic edit, the character is not the source of it.

- **Storyteller Override:** The Storyteller is the ultimate authority in every game. As such, she has the final say on what sorts of dramatic editing are and are not believable. If a given dramatic edit will ruin the entire plot, seems overly powerful or intrusive, or simply doesn't fit into the world of *Adventure*, the Storyteller is completely within her rights to deny the player that dramatic edit. Negotiation and refinement is acceptable (see "Believability," above), though, to keep the pace of the game running smoothly, such modifications should be handled quickly and with decisive action by the Storyteller. Once the Storyteller's final answer is "no," that's it. End of discussion. If the Storyteller refuses an edit, the character does not lose the ponied up Inspiration, since it was never actually spent.

Dramatic Editing Costs Table

| Inspiration | Effect                                      |
|-------------|---|
| 1           | Minor offscreen effect                      |
| 1           | Minor extension of an other player's effect |
| 2           | Minor onscreen effect                       |
| 3           | Major onscreen effect                       |
| 4           | Obvious continuity violation                |
| +1          | Plot ramifications                          |
| -1          | Plot complications for a character          |



## Cause and Effect

This section outlines the degree of influence characters may apply to dramatic editing; Inspiration costs are listed in brackets.

### Minor Offscreen Effect (1 Inspiration)

A minor offscreen effect cannot possibly save the character right away, but it can bring help within 15 minutes to an hour. That may be too late depending on the circumstances (like a vat filling with acid), but works just fine for less immediately deadly events (like a shipwreck with no help in sight).

**Examples:** *An airplane flying far overhead happens to see the characters' SOS; a firefighter 20 minutes away notices a column of smoke from the fire endangering the team.*

### Minor Extension (1 Inspiration)

A minor extension expands on a coincidence that another player's character has generated. This extension cannot get too blatant — no fair turning the piece of shipwreck flotsam into a motorboat — but it can build upon another character's coincidence in order to let it help the current character as well.

**Examples:** *That convenient vine dangles just a little lower down than previously thought; look, there's another parachute behind the one you just found in that cabinet!*

### Minor Onscreen Effect (2 Inspiration)

A minor onscreen effect won't save the character's life by itself, but it can give him some breathing room or a fighting chance. It may include the unexpected arrival of Background or Storyteller characters who, while unable to rescue the character directly, can provide other sorts of aid. Alternatively, it may be a piece of (easily concealed) equipment the character "forgot" that he'd had or something similar.

**Examples:** *The character wriggles an arm free from the ropes tying him to the buzz saw; a large piece of wreckage from the shipwreck crests a wave nearby just as the character begins to tire out.*

### Major Onscreen Effect (3 Inspiration)

A major onscreen effect saves the character's life or even the lives of the whole team. This effect can be just about anything that doesn't contradict the Storyteller's summary of the situation.

**Examples:** *The plane's emergency supply locker has enough parachutes for the whole team; just a few feet below the character is a meter-wide ledge along the cliff that leads to safety.*

### Obvious Continuity Violation (4 Inspiration)

An obvious continuity violation directly contradicts the Storyteller's description of the scene or is just thoroughly beyond the bounds of plausibility. Clearly, this use

of dramatic editing demands the Storyteller's scrutiny, but it should be possible as long as it is appropriately creative and maintains the feel of the game and the genre.

**Examples:** *Oh, this is Dr. Smith's submersible car, you see; the assassin about to strike the killing blow is actually an old friend from grammar school; the flames lick at the spilled gasoline — but those barrels labeled "Petrol" were actually filled with water!*

### Plot Ramification (+1 Inspiration)

A plot ramification gives the characters a clue to solving a mystery that has plagued them, winds one of the villain's henchmen in jail or brings any character in the group an unexpected benefit. This extra cost also applies if a player chooses to solve the team's problem by making another player character's life much harder through injury, social inconvenience or great expense. Relatively minor things (loss of property worth two dots less than the target's Resources Background, a loss of cleanliness or basic human dignity) do not incur this cost penalty. Feel free to pile those sorts of things on.

This charge can be used to directly influence the character's situation in the present scene, but it is meant to represent fortuitous events that occur perpendicular to current events. In other words, it won't generally aid the characters in dealing with his immediate situation, but will provide a useful benefit to the story afterward.

### Plot Complication (-1 Inspiration)

A plot complication is a circumstance during the scene that makes life harder for the character who spends the Inspiration. He breaks his leg leaping to safety just as the car careens over the cliff; he escapes from certain death only to fall under the influence of a lesser enemy; the characters' efforts to escape a deathtrap give the Czar enough time to make off with the character's significant other; and so on. Remember: there is no cost break (and there is often a cost penalty) for giving complications to other characters. That's a plot ramification, above. This cost break applies only if you give your own character a complication. As above, this should not be a trivial complication; breaking a nail or losing a pair of shoes will not score you this bonus.

A plot complication calls for particular scrutiny by the Storyteller. If one player is deliberately messing with another player's character for out-of-game reasons (rather than to make the episode more interesting), the request should be rejected flat-out. If both parties find the complication entertaining, the Storyteller should feel free to let it go through.

### Dramatic Editing Examples

Dramatic editing can be an iffy concept at first, because it can go in so many different directions. A few situations are outlined below that might call for dramatic editing, along with some dramatic edits that provide appropriate solutions.

**Example #1:** *Chris Barnett, square-jawed hero-at-large, finds himself in the Egyptian desert with only 10 bullets, 20 dollars, a ragged leather jacket and a few*



equally ragged companions. With their transportation destroyed by a bombardment from Doctor Zorbo's airborne battlecruiser, the expedition now stands no chance of reaching the Golden Temple of Osiris before Zorbo claims the Sarcophagus of Eternity for himself. Indeed, their very prospects for survival look bleak.

"Wait," says Barnett's player as the characters are trying to construct a makeshift shelter. "I think Chris knows this stretch of desert."

The Storyteller raises an eyebrow. "Oh? This better be good."

"It's like this, you see," the player says, grinning like a madman. "When Chris was in the French Foreign Legion, right after the Great War, the sergeant who trained him as a marksman was always talking about this girl he'd met when he was stationed in Egypt and how he wanted nothing more to retire to her village. Anyway, when Chris mustered out, Sarge said to look him up if Chris was ever in the neighborhood. And unless I miss my guess, that neighborhood is about 30 kilometers that way."

The Storyteller recalls that the character's background included a stint in the Foreign Legion, and a look at Barnett's character sheet reveals the character has an Ally who was never defined in detail. Chris' player gets the go-ahead to spend one Inspiration for a minor offscreen effect. After a harsh day trekking across the desert, the rest of the characters witness a heartfelt reunion between two former Legionnaires.

**Example #2:** Jill Sparrow is awakened rudely one night by an odd thumping noise from downstairs. Within a few moments, she ascertains two things: that there are several men ransacking her photo studio and that they're looking for a certain set of negatives that her adventuring companions have asked her to keep secure. Jill's no sort of fighter, and she doesn't have a telephone in her bedroom with which to call for help. A swift escape out the bedroom window looks like her best option, until....

"Hey," Jill's player asks, "Jill has a lot of chemicals down there, doesn't she?"

The Storyteller nods. "Yes. You've said she has a fully equipped lab and darkroom, so she'd have lots of different things for developing film."

"And if someone were to happen to open the wrong bucket while searching in the dark, there could be some unpleasant results?" the player asks.

"Sure, why not?" the Storyteller says. "It's not really going to hurt any of them, but if all you want to do is make them stop searching...."

The Storyteller calls it a minor onscreen effect, and Jill's player marks off two Inspiration. Just as Jill's contemplating her exit out the window, one of the mysterious searchers opens a bucket full of noxious waste chemicals. The putrid fumes reduce him to explosive nausea, and his companions drag him to fresh air before being overcome themselves. Listening to the fading commotion, Jill sighs.

She moistens a washrag, covers her face and goes downstairs to retrieve the negatives... and to open the windows.

**Example #3:** Millionaire playboy Steve MacFadden is at a society ball when he spots a team of assassins sent by his arch rival, Bryant Mullins. Assessing the situation, he realizes that the gunsels have all the exits blocked and they look like they're about to make a very public example of him.

MacFadden's player turns to the Storyteller. "They've blocked all the exits that they know about, you mean."

The Storyteller considers this. "Okay, but what exits does Steve know about that they don't?"

"Well," the player says, "we've never said how Steve made his fortune. But say he owns an architectural firm, and they just happened to design this building. As he recalls from his tour at this building's opening, a concealed staircase by the restrooms comes out in the garage. It was intended for maintenance, but none of the maintenance staff parks down there because those spaces were reserved for VIPs."

The Storyteller chuckles and declares this a major onscreen effect. Since MacFadden suddenly having an architectural firm builds upon the character's previous history, she also has MacFadden's player spend another Inspiration for a plot ramification.

MacFadden heads for the bathroom, trigger-happy killers hard on his heels, only to seemingly vanish around the corner. Ten minutes later, MacFadden's chauffeur is steering the millionaire's limousine away to safety while the assassins are still cursing one another as they search the bathroom.

## The Cliffhanger

The cliffhanger is an old convention from the days of serial fiction; one episode ends with Our Hero dangling from a cliff (or other crisis), with no help in sight and another danger looming over him. The theory (quite a successful one) was that readers, listeners or filmgoers would return to see how the hero gets himself out of such a predicament. Dramatic editing allows you to integrate cliffhanger-style cut scenes into *Adventure*, along the lines of the old-style serials.

Dramatic editing provides clear rules on how a player can influence the story to give his character a surprise break, as often occurs in tales of pulp derring-do. The cliffhanger functions in virtually the same manner; the distinction between the two lies in its function and placement within the story. Players use dramatic editing during the course of a story to save their characters from a troubling and unforeseen event or to make their actions in the scene all the more exciting. The Storyteller applies the cliffhanger intentionally at the end of a game session as a planned portion of the ongoing story. She intentionally leads events in the game to an exciting, large-scale final set piece, meant to leave the players with mouths agape in amazement and clamoring to find out *what happens next?*

Still, the cliffhanger should not end every session. It should be infrequent enough to be an exciting surprise



for the group. This is suggested for two reasons: Firstly, it's tough enough for the Storyteller to come up with an exciting session every week without forcing her to wrack her brains to create yet another inescapable death-trap to close out each one. Secondly, if the characters face certain death every single game session, the players will soon become jaded to the whole cliffhanger concept. It's then reduced to a spot to spend points and roll dice rather than the pulse-pounding thrill ride it should be.

Like any other use of dramatic editing, the cliffhanger gives a fair amount of control over to the players. The Storyteller should feel free to modify the rules to suit her tastes (or simply reject the rules altogether).

### When Last We Left Our Heroes...

Having crafted a final scene into which the characters plunge, the Storyteller describes in a short yet compelling narrative the shocking surprise situation in which the characters find themselves, and *then*—

—That's it for this episode! See everyone next time!

Just like in the old serials, the players are left to fret, wonder and thrill over just *what* will happen to the heroes! The distinction here is that *they* will be the ones to decide. Players are welcome to take the week or however long between sessions to think about what they'll have their characters do to get out of the jam they're in. At the start of the next game session, the Storyteller recaps events. She presents the group with a pared-down (yet still exciting) description of the scene. This can be handled in much the same way that a moviegoer might describe a film he'd seen to his friends. If the Storyteller doesn't trust her memory, she should take notes at the end of the session (or ask a fellow player to do so) to remind her what "just" happened.

The players then get a few moments to act as Storyteller, spending their characters' Inspiration to change enough of the current predicament to enable a suitably heroic escape. Again, as with dramatic editing, this use of Inspiration allows for a certain amount of scene rewriting. Since the cliffhanger is an epic event, the player is encouraged to dig more deeply into his Inspiration stash. In contrast, Storyteller characters *cannot* spend Inspiration for dramatic editing purposes during the cliffhanger. The cliffhanger is a chance for the players' characters to shine.

### Resolving the Cliffhanger

After the Storyteller sets the scene, the players take turns describing their characters' escape from the predicament. The character with the lowest base Initiative score goes first, his player describing further details to the scene based on the amount of Inspiration he wants to spend. Subsequent players describe their characters' contributions to the scene and spend Inspiration as they wish when their turns come around. They may build on the elements applied by previous players if they want to and can do so plausibly. By this process, each character spending one or two Inspiration might well get the whole team out of a jam, rather

than forcing a single character to spend four or five on his own. On the other hand, with a large group, it might be better for a single character to spend those four or five points than for each member to lose one or two.

A character has a single turn to act when resolving the cliffhanger, regardless of any Inspiration spent. This action is resolved before the crisis comes to a head. While the action is typically a part of that character's dramatic edit within the scene, it doesn't *have* to be. Also, the character doesn't have to wait for everyone else to resolve the rest of the crisis first. If a player knows that his character will need more than that one turn's worth of action, he can give his character an additional action by spending a point of Inspiration as part of his dramatic edit.

If he doesn't use Inspiration points, the character can only act within the confines of the established scene. This may happen for a couple reasons. A character may not have enough Inspiration laying around to actually save himself, or the player may choose to not spend any Inspiration. In this case, the character is at the mercy of the scene's flow.

Since we're talking about a cliffhanger — a dramatic, life-threatening situation — the Storyteller is within her rights to carry out the scene to its inevitable conclusion. It's highly unlikely the character will escape danger unscathed (and death is certainly a possibility). Some Storytellers may think it rude to invite a player over only to kill his character off 15 minutes into the game session when the character cannot escape a particularly cunning cliffhanger. On the other hand, a crafty player may decide "I'm not spending any Inspiration since I know you won't *really* kill me..." A Storyteller in such a predicament should never make clear whether she'll allow a character that ignores a cliffhanger to meet his doom. Killing such a character would not be out of the question! That is the drama of pulp, after all. As a middle ground, the Storyteller might graciously choose to mangle the character, making his adventuring life difficult (say reducing a given Trait or Traits by a few dots), but not impossible, for the next few sessions of play. This act should serve to make it clear that cliffhangers are a real danger without needlessly killing off characters.

### That Was Close!

A Storyteller should definitely give the team some kind of reward, either through information or tangible benefit, for surviving a cliffhanger. After all, it may take a lot of Inspiration to get through a cliffhanger alive; while there is a certain amount of fun to be had just in getting out of trouble, these kinds of scenes should be worth a little something more than your typical dramatic edit.

Indeed, the Storyteller may hand out Inspiration points, as in any other situation where a character performs a particularly exciting action that adds to the enjoyment of the game for everyone and to the story itself. That's the key, of course. Leaping to safety in the nick of time may be a fine resolution for the character but not worthy of an Inspiration reward. In contrast, flinging one-



self at the swinging scythe and grabbing the flat of the blade at *just the right moment* — straining to hold it in place while the rest of the team uses those precious seconds to escape! — is a conveniently hazardous and heroic maneuver worthy of an Inspiration.

Once the cliffhanger is resolved, the Storyteller steps in and starts the story rolling with that episode's adventure. Quite often events pick up where the cliffhanger ended, but the Storyteller may also cut the scene and join the characters later; the decision is the Storyteller's and should be whatever works best for the story.

## Cliffhanger Example

**Example:** *Dr. Tenzing Smith, Ace Borgstrom, Lady Lead and El Mono Loco are racing down a steep dirt road in Smith's rented cargo truck, having just rescued Lady Lead's onetime beau Jack Finnegan from the clutches of one of the insidious Ubiquitous Dragon's lieutenants. Lady Lead, Jack and El Mono Loco are in the closed and latched cargo area, while Smith and Borgstrom are in the truck's cab.*

*Suddenly, Smith shouts! The brakes aren't working; the brake line must have been cut! The truck hurtles down the dirt road toward the edge of a 100-foot cliff. The Storyteller ends the session just as the truck shoots over the cliff's edge!*

*At the beginning of the next game session, the Storyteller recaps the situation just described above. Jack is Inspired, but as a Storyteller character, he can't affect the cliffhanger's outcome with dramatic editing. Lady Lead has the lowest Initiative score of the team; her player spends two Inspiration and explains that the rattling latch on the cargo area comes loose, swinging the door open. Lady Lead grabs Jack and leaps onto the high hillside just in time, using her stalwart strength in her action. Lady Lead's player must make a Might roll; she spends a point of Willpower to ensure success — Rachel and Jack roll to safety on the cliffside as the truck hurtles to its doom!*

*Dr. Smith is up next and decides to blow his remaining two Inspiration on a minor onscreen effect — a tree with low overhanging branches scrapes by the truck, and he lunges out his door to grab hold of a branch. This is Dr. Smith's free action, requiring an Athletics roll to pull it off. The doctor succeeds and is safe, though dangling from a tree high above the Pacific Ocean!*

*Ace Borgstrom has no Inspiration left, having spent it all in the climax of the previous session. His player does not relish the idea of Ace taking a long fall into the shallow ocean, inside the truck or out, so he decides to take a plot complication playing off of Smith's coincidence — that huge tree branch sticks out the width of the truck and then some. When Borgstrom jumps for it, he realizes his treasured leather jacket — which contained his wallet stuffed with hundreds of dollars and his driver's and pilot's licenses and his trusty .45 — was still on the truck's seat!*

*El Mono Loco has plenty of Inspiration left, but is*

*suffering serious wound penalties from his fight with the Ubiquitous Dragon's fiendish henchmen. He can't afford to rely on his action with such a reduced dice pool, so his player has to whip up a pretty amazing coincidence. Spending three Inspiration for a major onscreen effect, he declares that the wind from the truck's fall whips the canvas top of the truck's cargo area; El Mono Loco grabs hold of opposite corners of the canvas before it flies away and uses it as a makeshift parachute!*

*Some Storytellers might charge El Mono Loco's player four Inspiration for this stunt, since it pushes the bounds of plausibility. El Mono Loco's Storyteller is amused enough by the player's ingenuity that she considered rewarding him an extra Inspiration and decided to just let it slide as a three-point effort.*

*As the team dangles there, watching the truck plummet into the ocean, one of them notices a mysterious airplane flying toward a remote island, just at the horizon. Could it be the Ubiquitous Dragon's secret base? The team scrambles back up to safety to decide where to go next....*

## Combat Systems

Combat in *Adventure* tries to capture the larger-than-life feats common to the pulp genre without downplaying the grim reality of injury and death. What results is a system true to the dynamics, limitations and viciousness of real combat, while still leaving room for the unique (and often spectacular) elements that adventurers bring to it.

The Storyteller should be flexible when arbitrating combat situations; no rules can fully reflect the variety of situations encountered in battle. If any part of these systems slows down the game or causes bickering, don't use it. Combat systems are meant to add depth to the game, not create conflict between the players and the Storyteller.

### Types of Combat

There are three types of combat, each involving the same basic system with minor differences:

- **Close Combat:** This designation covers unarmed combat and melee. Unarmed combat can be anything from a down-and-dirty dockside brawl or an honorable test of skill. Opponents must be within touching distance (one meter) to engage in unarmed combat. Melee involves hand-held weapons, from broken bottles to katanas. Opponents must be within one to two meters of each other to engage in melee.
- **Ranged Combat:** This designation covers combat using projectile weapons — knives, bows, pistols, rifles, etc. Normally, opponents must be within sight (and weapon range) of each other to engaged in a firefight.
- **Armored Combat:** This term covers combat between vehicles using mounted weaponry — from biplanes to zeppelins, ships to submersibles. Opponents must be within weapons range to engage in armored combat.



## Stunts and Props

Combats are much more enjoyable when every player has a place in describing his character's actions as part of the interactive scene. Few things are less exciting in a roleplaying game than hearing a 15-minute exchange of "I try to punch him. I rolled three successes." "You hit, roll four dice for damage." "One success." "Okay, roll initiative for next turn." Description of bold action makes the game more real and much more enjoyable: "I drop into a squat to duck the thug's punch and then rise up fast, leading with my fist, to sock him in the jaw!" "Your blow catches the goon by surprise! He smashes into a pool cue rack, falling to the ground amid a clatter of wooden cues." There's a reason why Jackie Chan's movies and the Indiana Jones films are so much fun. Okay, there are lots of reasons, but a big part of it is that the fights range all over, using exciting stunts and incorporating all manner of props to make for an incredible ballet of mayhem.

Clever stunts and tricks make a game much more enjoyable. To this end, a Storyteller may give a player a bonus of one to three dice on an attack roll in close combat to reward a well-described and appropriate stunt. This stunt can purely be a dramatic maneuver — feinting right, then left, only to bring a knee up into the guy's crotch, for instance — or can incorporate some aspect of the scenery — such as ducking behind a half-open door to avoid a blow, then slamming the door into the other guy.

The Storyteller is never *required* to provide this bonus, and she should feel free to discard it when a player describes the same stunt again and again or comes up with a routine unsuitable for the scene just to get some bonus dice. On the other hand, the player of a martial artist who works up a series of regular maneuvers that are a part of his character's fighting style should get that reward fairly often. The goal here is to reward cleverness and contribution to the game.

The Storyteller may bestow the bonus to characters executing clever gun tricks and stunts, but she should restrict it to no more than two dice. This is intentional: In the sorts of pulp action stories and films that *Adventure* simulates, fists and guns are much more evenly balanced than they are in real life. Thus, to encourage that style of combat, bonus dice are always more suitable to fist fights than to firefights. As always, the Storyteller's word is law.

## Combat Turns

In combat, many things happen at virtually the same time. Since this can make things a bit sticky in a game, combat is divided into a series of three-second turns. Each combat turn has four stages — setup, initiative, attack and resolution — to make it easier to keep track of things.

### Stage One: Setup

Before the start of each turn, the Storyteller briefly describes the scene from each character's perspective. This constant narration is essential to avoid confusion. It helps the Storyteller organize and arrange events so all goes smoothly when the players interact with the game environment. The Storyteller should make her descriptions interesting and exciting, leaving open all sorts of possibilities for the characters' actions.

### Stage Two: Initiative

This stage organizes the turn and is when you declare your character's action. Various actions are possible — anything from leaping behind a wall to shouting a warning. You must declare what your character does, in as much detail as the Storyteller requires.

Everyone rolls one die and adds it to their character's Initiative rating (Dexterity + Wits). The character with the highest result acts first, with the remaining characters acting in decreasing order of result. If two characters get the same total, the one with the higher Initiative rating goes first. If Initiative scores are also the same, the two characters act simultaneously. Wound penalties subtract directly from a character's Initiative rating.

Declarations occur in reverse order of final initiative, thus giving faster characters the opportunity to react to slower characters' actions. Although you declare your character's action now, including stating that he delays his action to see what someone else does, you wait until the attack stage to implement that action. At this time, you must also state if your character will perform any multiple actions, activate any powers and/or spend Willpower or Inspiration points.

All of your character's actions are staged at his rank in the initiative order. There are three exceptions to this rule. The first is if your character delays his action, in which case his maneuvers happen when he finally decides to take action. Your character may act at any time after his designated order in the initiative, even to interrupt another, slower character's action. If two characters both delay and then act at the same time, the one with the higher initiative result for the turn acts first.

The second breach of the initiative order occurs in the case of a defensive action (see "Aborting Actions" and "Defensive Maneuvers," on the next page), which your character may perform at any time, as long as he has an action left.

Finally, all multiple actions and additional actions occur at the end of the turn. If two or more characters take multiple actions, the actions occur in the order of initiative rating. An exception is made for defensive mul-



multiple actions, such as multiple dodges, which happen as needed in order to avert attack.

## Stage Three: Attack

Attacks are the meat of the combat turn. An action's success or failure and potential impact on the target are determined at this stage. You use a certain Ability depending on the type of combat in which your character is engaged:

- **Close Combat:** Use Brawl or Martial Arts (unarmed) or Melee (armed).
- **Ranged Combat:** Use Athletics (thrown weapons), Archery (bows) or Firearms (guns).
- **Armored Combat:** Use Firearms.

Like any other action, if your character doesn't have points in the necessary Ability, simply default to the Attribute on which it's based (Strength for Archery and Brawl; Dexterity for Athletics, Firearms, Martial Arts and Melee). Your attack dice pool may be modified depending on the maneuver and/or weapon your character uses. Storyteller characters known as "extras" are an exception; see Chapter Eight: Heroes and Villains (p. 244). Refer to the list of maneuvers that follow and the various weapon statistics (starting p. 249) for details.

Attacks are usually standard actions, but a difficulty may apply, depending on the circumstances (ma-

neuver used, cramped quarters, range modifiers). If you get no successes, your character fails his attack and inflicts no damage. If you botch, the attack fails *and* something nasty happens — the weapon jams or explodes, the blade breaks, the character hits an ally, etc.

## Stage Four: Resolution

During this stage, you determine the damage your character's attack inflicts, and the Storyteller describes what occurs in that turn. Resolution is a mixture of game and story; it's more interesting for players to hear "Your uppercut thunders against his jaw, lifting him off the ground and sending him crashing through a window" than simply "Uh, he loses three health levels." Attacks and damage are merely ways of describing what happens in the story, and it's important to maintain the narrative of combat even as you make the die roll.

Normally, additional successes gained on a Trait roll simply mean that you do exceptionally well. *In combat, each extra success you score on an attack roll equals an additional die you add automatically to your damage effect!* This creates cinematic (and often deadly) combat. You may add a maximum of five damage dice in this fashion. Furthermore, area and explosive attacks may not add attack successes to damage, as there is little opportunity for finesse when delivering such an attack.

## Combat Summary Chart

### Stage One: Setup

- The Storyteller updates the scene for each player's character.

### Stage Two: Initiative

- Roll Initiative. Everyone declares actions. The character with the highest initiative result performs his action first. Actions can be delayed to any time later in the initiative order.
- Declare any multiple actions, reducing dice pools accordingly.

### Stage Three: Attack

- For unarmed close-combat attacks, roll Brawl or Martial Arts
- For armed close-combat attacks, roll Melee.
- For ranged attacks, roll Athletics (thrown weapons), Archery (bows) or Firearms (guns).
- A character can abort to a defensive action (block, dodge, parry) at any time before his normal action, as long as the player makes a successful Willpower roll (or spends one Willpower point).

### Stage Four: Resolution

- Determine total damage effect (weapon type and/or maneuver), adding any extra dice gained from successes on the attack roll.
- Subtract the target's soak (if applicable).
- Roll damage effect; target marks health levels as appropriate to the successes rolled.



## Damage Types

All attacks have specific damage ratings, indicating the number of dice that you roll for the attack's damage. This rating is called the "damage effect." Some damage effects are based on the attacker's Strength, while others are based on the weapon used. Each success on the damage effect roll inflicts one health level of damage on the target. The damage applied may be one of two types:

- **Bashing:** Punches and other blunt trauma that are less likely to kill a victim instantly. All characters use their full Stamina ratings to resist bashing effects, and the damage heals fairly quickly. The maneuver and weapons charts (pp. 205 and 250) list bashing attacks with a "B," and damage is applied to the health boxes on your character sheet with a "/."

- **Lethal:** Attacks meant to cause immediate and fatal injury. Characters may not use Stamina to resist lethal damage, and the effects takes quite a while to heal. The maneuver and weapons charts (pp. 205 and 250) list lethal attacks with an "L," and damage is marked in the health boxes on your character sheet with an "X."

Damage effect rolls cannot botch; a botched roll simply means the attack glances harmlessly off the target. Specifics on applying damage effects are described under "Health," page 207.

## Damage Adds Versus Damage Dice

Vehicle-scale weapons deliver a wallop far deadlier than the average human being can withstand. While most human-level attacks are made in terms of damage dice — thus inflicting a fair bit of damage or none at all, depending on the roll — particularly destructive attacks often do a certain minimum level of damage even on a glancing blow. Thus, most vehicles' weapons deliver a certain number of *automatic* damage successes, which are inflicted *in addition* to the damage roll.

These automatic damage successes are called "damage adds" and are always presented in brackets. See *Armored Combat* (p. 206) for more information.

**Example:** *Danger Ace strafes the cultists atop the temple with his machine gun. His attack inflicts 6 [4] lethal damage. The attack delivers four levels of lethal damage automatically, as indicated by the [4], plus an additional number of health levels equal to the number of successes Danger Ace's player rolls on his damage effect.*

## Soak

All characters can resist a certain degree of physical punishment; doing so is called "soaking" damage. Your character's "soak" is based on his Stamina. Characters *soak one die of bashing damage per point of Stamina* (reflecting the body's natural resilience to such attacks). Characters cannot use Stamina to soak lethal damage, due to the brutal and invasive nature of such attacks. The human body can endure some abuse, but it's not capable of dealing with a bullet's traumatic impact. Armor can

soak lethal damage, however (see below).

The soak rating subtracts automatically from your attacker's total damage effect *before* damage is rolled. Moreover, you subtract soak from damage adds *before* you subtract damage dice.

However, even if your soak is higher than your attacker's damage effect, your opponent *still* rolls one die. This applies as a bashing damage effect even if the original attack was lethal. This reflects that the attack was little more than a glancing blow, inflicting a minor cut or bruise but causing no lasting damage.

Certain Knacks can increase a character's soak. See Chapter Four for details.

## Armor

Simply put, armor adds to your character's soak. The armor's rating combines with the base soak for purposes of reducing damage. Light armor offers a small amount of protection, but it doesn't greatly hinder mobility. Heavy armor provides a lot of protection, but restricts flexibility.

Some armor is designed to shield against bashing effects, some against lethal — and some protects against both. Armor is not indestructible. If the damage effect from a single attack equals twice the armor's rating (prior to applying soak), the armor is destroyed.

Armor types, their ratings and other specifics are described on page 253.

### Rule Option: Lethal Soak

The human body isn't designed to withstand the brute physical trauma inflicted by gunshots and knife wounds. Yet, it can be argued that some people are resilient enough to withstand these effects to some degree. A hardy, physically fit person is more likely to survive being shot than a frail, weak person is.

You have the option to introduce a lethal soak into your game (the Storyteller gets the final say). Lethal soak lends naturally tough characters some degree of protection based on their Stamina ratings. Using this optional rule gives *all* characters a base soak against lethal damage as indicated on the chart below. The soak functions just like a natural bashing soak, except that it applies to lethal damage.

| Stamina Rating | Base Lethal Soak |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1              | 0                |
| 2              | 1                |
| 3              | 1                |
| 4              | 2                |
| 5              | 2                |



### Personal Combat

These maneuvers give you a variety of choices in combat. Roleplaying combat is more entertaining if you can visualize your character's moves instead of simply rolling dice.

### Maneuver Characteristics

Maneuvers with specific combat effects may modify your attack roll, difficulty or damage effect.

- **Ability:** The dice pool used for the action taken. If your character doesn't have a rating in the Ability, default to its base Attribute.
- **Accuracy:** The dice added to the roll to hit an opponent. A "+3" adds three dice to the dice pool for that attack.
- **Difficulty:** The added successes beyond the base one needed to accomplish the action. A "+2" difficulty means you need a total of three successes.
- **Damage:** The modifier to the damage dice pool. A "+1" means you add one die when rolling the damage effect.

### General Maneuvers

- **Aborting Actions:** You can abort your character's declared action to a defensive maneuver as long as your character hasn't already acted in the turn. Actions that can be aborted to include block, dodge and parry (see below). Aborting can be handled as a single action or as part of a multiple action — although you must already have declared a multiple action for the turn prior to aborting. A successful Willpower roll (or expenditure of a Willpower point) is required for a character to abort an action and perform a defensive one instead. When spending Willpower for an abort maneuver, the player may declare the expenditure at the time of the abort. The Willpower roll is considered a reflexive action.
- **Additional Actions:** A character may normally perform a single action in a turn. He may split this into more than one "sub-action," as described in "Multiple Actions," below. Certain Knacks give a character at least one extra *Full* action, though. This means the character has more than one complete and separate action that he may perform that turn. An additional action can be used just like a regular action — split into multiple actions, used to go fully defensive or taken as a single full action.
- **Ambush:** Ambushes involve surprising a target to get in a decisive first strike. The attacker rolls *Stealth* in a resisted action against the target's *Awareness*. If the attacker scores more successes, he can stage one free attack on the target and adds any extra successes from the resisted roll to his attack dice pool. On a tie, the attacker still attacks first, although the target may perform a defensive maneuver. If the defender gets more successes, she spots the ambush, and both parties roll initiative normally. Targets already involved in combat cannot be ambushed.
- **Blind Fighting/Fire:** Staging attacks while unable to see usually incurs a +2 difficulty. *Ability* specialties

such as *Blind Fighting* and *Blind Fire* may be used to offset the penalty.

- **Called Shot:** Aiming for a specific location incurs an added difficulty but can bypass armor or cover or can result in an increased damage effect. The Storyteller should consider special results beyond the simple increase in damage listed here, depending on the attack and the target.

| Target Size                | Difficulty | Damage |
|----------------------------|------------|--------|
| Medium (limb, briefcase)   | +1         | +2     |
| Small (hand, head, book)   | +2         | +3     |
| Precise (eye, groin, lock) | +3         | +4     |

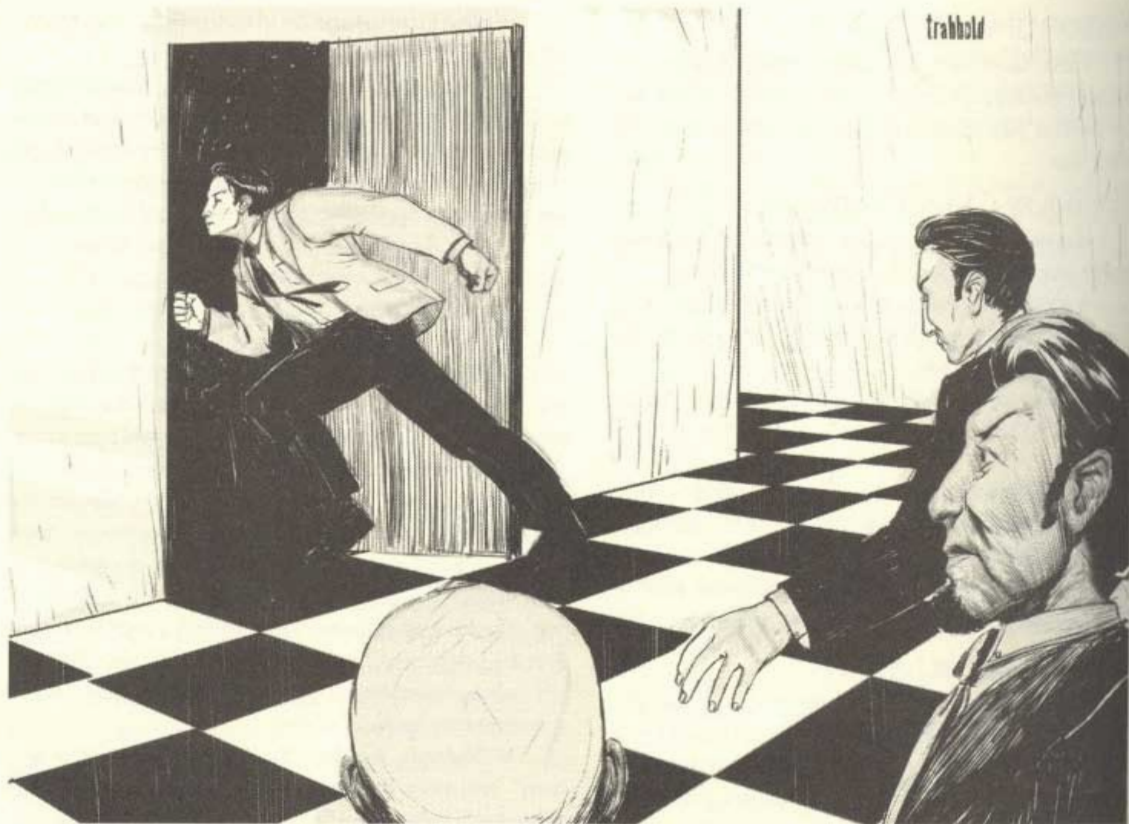
- **Flank and Rear Attacks:** Characters attacking targets from the flank gain an additional attack die. Characters attacking from the rear gain two additional attack dice.
- **Movement:** A character may move half his running distance (see "Move," p. 187) and still take an action in a turn. Other maneuvers, such as leaping or tumbling, may be considered separate actions, depending on their complexity. A running target enjoys +1 difficulty to any attacks made against him, while a sprinting target gets a +2 difficulty. The Storyteller may apply additional difficulties when shooting at fast-moving targets such as speeding cars or swift planes.
- **Multiple Actions:** By definition, "multiple actions" are more than one task performed as part of a character's sole action for a turn. As such, *multiple* actions are different from *additional* actions (see above). When a player declares multiple actions, subtract dice from the first dice pool equal to the *total* number of actions taken. Each subsequent action loses an additional die (cumulative). A character may perform multiple offensive and/or defensive maneuvers — though if he's attacked more times than he has defensive actions he cannot try to avoid the hit. The only exception to the multiple actions rule is going "fully defensive," below.

### Defensive Maneuvers

It's a given that your character tries to avoid being hit in combat — that's why everyone makes attack rolls. Sometimes, though, all your character wants to do is avoid attacks. You may announce a defensive action at any time before your opponent makes an attack roll, as long as your character has an action left to perform. You can declare a defensive action on your character's turn in the initiative or can abort, replacing his intended action with a defensive maneuver. You must make a successful Willpower roll (or may simply spend one Willpower point) to abort. If the Willpower roll fails, your character must carry out the action that you declared originally.

There are three types of defensive actions: *block*, *dodge* and *parry*. Your character can defend against virtually any kind of attack with these three maneuvers. However, your character may not be able to avoid every single attack that's directed at him. He can't dodge when there's no room to maneuver, and he can't block or parry if he doesn't know an attack is coming.





Each defensive maneuver uses the same basic system: The defensive action is a resisted roll against the opponent's attack roll. Unless the attacker gets more total successes, she misses. If the attacker gets more successes, those that she achieves *in excess of* the defender's successes, if any, are applied to the damage effect. So even if the defender has fewer successes than the attacker does, the defender's maneuver can still reduce the attack's effectiveness.

- **Block:** A Brawl or Martial Arts maneuver using your character's own body to deflect a hand-to-hand bashing attack. Lethal attacks cannot be blocked unless the defender is wearing armor.

- **Dodge:** An Athletics or Martial Arts maneuver useful for avoiding attacks of all types. Your character bobs and weaves to avoid close-combat attacks (if there's no room to maneuver, he must block or parry instead). In firefights, your character moves at least one meter and ends up behind cover (if there's no room to maneuver and/or no cover available, he can drop to the ground). If your character remains under cover or prone thereafter, cover rules apply against further ranged weapon attacks (see "Cover," p. 204).

- **Parry:** A Melee maneuver using a weapon to block an Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts or Melee attack. If a character makes a Brawl attack and the defender parries with a weapon that normally causes lethal damage, the parrying weapon may actually damage the attacker! If the defender rolled more successes than the attacker did, the defender

applies the weapon's base damage plus the parry's extra successes as a damage effect against the attacker.

Block, dodge and/or parry can be performed as part of a multiple action — punching, then blocking; shooting, then dodging; parrying, then striking; and the like. Using a multiple action to act and defend is advantageous because your character can still accomplish something in a turn besides avoiding attacks. Your character may also combine different defensive maneuvers in a multiple action — blocking, then dodging; dodging, then parrying; blocking, then blocking again; and so on.

**Example:** Max Mercer wants to punch two thugs, then be ready to dodge two attacks. This is considered four separate actions using his Martial Arts dice pool of 9 for the strikes and his Athletics dice pool of 9 for the dodges. The first punch loses four dice (leaving Max five dice in his dice pool) because he's taking four actions. The second punch loses five dice (four actions plus an additional cumulative penalty), giving Max four dice to strike. The first dodge has a dice pool of three (losing six dice as per the multiple-action rules). The final dodge uses only two dice (reduced by seven dice cumulatively).

- **Fully Defensive:** Rather than make defensive maneuvers part of a multiple action, you may declare that your character spends an entire turn *doing nothing but performing a single type of defensive maneuver!* Going "fully defensive" does *not* use the normal multiple-action rules. Instead, you have a full dice pool for the first defensive action but lose one die, cumulatively, for each subsequent de-



fense action made in the same turn. Remember that defensive actions versus multiple attackers still suffer difficulty penalties (see "Multiple Opponents" on the next page).

**Example:** Max Mercer spends a whole turn dodging. With a Martial Arts 9 dice pool, he can dodge up to nine attacks! Max's player rolls nine dice against the first attack, eight dice against the second, seven dice against the third, six dice against the fourth, etc. Max can't do anything else that turn but dodge.

## Close Combat Maneuvers

This is simply a list of common maneuvers used in close combat; feel free to develop your own moves (with the Storyteller's approval). The pulp genre is full of wild improvisation, after all.

Hand-to-hand attacks inflict bashing damage unless stated otherwise. The damage melee weapons inflict depends on the weapon type (see the Melee Weapons Table, p. 250) and always adds in the attacker's Strength rating unless otherwise indicated.

The Storyteller may modify difficulty and damage for these maneuvers, depending on the combat style the character uses. As always, drama and excitement take precedence over rules systems.

- **Clinch:** On a successful attack roll, the attacker goes into a clinch with the target. In the first turn, the attacker may roll Strength + 2 damage. In each subsequent turn, combatants act on their orders in the initiative. A combatant can inflict a Strength + 2 damage effect or attempt to escape the clinch. No other actions are allowed until one combatant breaks free. To escape a clinch, make a resisted Brawl or Martial Arts roll against the opponent. If the escaping character has more successes, she breaks free; if not, the characters continue to grapple in the next turn.

**Ability:** Brawl, Martial Arts **Difficulty:** Normal  
**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Strength + 2

- **Disarm:** To knock a weapon from an opponent's hand, the attacker rolls at +1 difficulty, if armed, +2 difficulty, if unarmed. If successful, the attacker rolls damage effect (do not subtract soak). If successes rolled exceed the opponent's Strength rating, the opponent takes no damage but is disarmed. A botch usually means the attacker drops his own weapon or is struck by his target's weapon.

**Ability:** Martial Arts, Melee **Difficulty:** Special  
**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Special

- **Hold:** This attack inflicts no damage, as the intent is to immobilize rather than injure the subject. On a successful roll, the attacker holds the target until the subject's next action. At that time, both combatants roll resisted Brawl or Martial Arts actions. The subject remains immobilized (able to take no other action) until she rolls more successes than the attacker does.

**Ability:** Brawl, Martial Arts **Difficulty:** Normal  
**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** None

- **Kick:** Kicks range from simple front kicks to aerial spins. The base attack is +1 difficulty and inflicts the attacker's Strength + 4 in damage. The Storyteller may modify these ratings further, increasing in difficulty and/or damage as the maneuver increases in complexity.

**Ability:** Brawl, Martial Arts **Difficulty:** +1

**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Strength + 4

- **Multiple Maneuvers:** An attacker may perform any defensive and/or close combat maneuver as part of a multiple attack. The dice pool used, modifiers to hit and damage depend on the number of attacks declared and the maneuvers involved. See "Multiple Actions," page 201, for more details.

- **Multiple Opponents:** A character who battles multiple opponents in close combat suffers defense difficulties of +1, cumulative, for each opponent after the first (to a maximum of +4).

- **Strike:** The attacker lashes out with his fist. The base attack is a standard action and inflicts the character's Strength + 2 in damage. The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty and/or damage depending on the type of punch: hook, jab, haymaker, karate strike, uppercut, etc.

**Ability:** Brawl, Martial Arts **Difficulty:** Normal

**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Strength + 2

- **Sweep:** The attacker uses his own legs to knock the legs out from under his opponent. The target takes Strength + 1 damage and must roll Athletics at +3 difficulty or Might at +2 difficulty or suffer a knockdown (see "Maneuver Complications," p. 205).

The attacker can also use a staff, chain or similar implement to perform a sweep. The effect is the same, although the target takes damage per the weapon type.

**Ability:** Martial Arts, Melee **Difficulty:** Normal

**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Special

- **Tackle:** The attacker rushes his opponent, tackling her to the ground. The attack roll is +1 difficulty and inflicts Strength + 3 damage. Additionally, both combatants make resisted Might rolls, with the attacker adding a number of dice equal to the damage successes he achieved. The loser suffers a knockdown (see "Maneuver Complications," p. 205); on a tie, both go down. Even if the target stays up, she is unbalanced, acting at half her normal initiative in the next turn (round down).

**Ability:** Brawl **Difficulty:** +1

**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Strength + 3

- **Throw:** The attacker grabs his opponent at +1 difficulty and tosses her, using her own momentum to help propel her through the air. The target is launched a number of meters equal to the attacker's Strength (opponents with a lot of momentum may travel up to an extra two meters). The target automatically suffers a knockdown (see "Maneuver Complications," p. 205), and she takes Strength + 1 damage, plus an additional die of damage for every two meters she was thrown (rounded down). Landing on harmful objects or debris can increase



the damage effect further. A victim with Martial Arts Ability mastery and an action left for the turn may attempt a roll at +1 difficulty when thrown; if successful, she controls her fall to land on her feet and suffers no damage!

**Ability:** Brawl, Martial Arts **Difficulty:** +1  
**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Special

• **Weapon Length:** It's hard to get in range with a punch or knife if your opponent wields a sword or staff. A character being fended off with a longer weapon must close in one yard, then strike, suffering +1 difficulty to his attack in the process.

• **Weapon Strike:** A slashing blow, thrust or jab, depending on the weapon used. See the Melee Weapons Table, page 250, for particulars.

**Ability:** Melee **Difficulty:** Normal  
**Accuracy:** Normal **Damage:** Weapon

## Ranged Combat Maneuvers

Many physical conflicts involve ranged weapons. The following maneuvers allow for a number of useful actions during a firefight, but don't feel limited by this list. If the need arises, try developing a new maneuver (at the Storyteller's discretion). Refer to the Ranged Weapons Table, page 251, for specific information.

• **Aiming:** The attacker adds one die to his attack roll on a single shot for each turn spent aiming. The maximum number of dice the character can gain this way equals his Perception. A scope adds two more dice to the attacker's pool in the first turn of aiming (in addition to those added for Perception). The character must have at least one point in Archery or Firearms, as appropriate, to perform this maneuver. The attacker may do nothing but aim during this time and cannot effectively aim at a target that is moving faster than a walk.

• **Automatic Fire:** The weapon unloads its entire ammunition clip in one attack against a single target. The attacker rolls once, adding 10 dice to his accuracy. However, the attack roll is at +2 difficulty due to the weapon's recoil. Extra successes add to the damage (to a maximum of five extra dice), which is treated as equivalent to one attack when applying soak. An attacker using automatic fire may not target a specific area of the body. This attack is permissible only if the weapon's clip is at least half-full to begin with.

**Ability:** Firearms **Difficulty:** +2  
**Accuracy:** +10 **Damage:** Special

**Example:** *Safari Jack Tallon unloads his Tommy gun at the advancing zombie lion. His player rolls 17 dice on the attack (Firearms 7 plus the automatic fire bonus), getting nine successes. The lion doesn't dodge, so Safari Jack has six extra successes (he loses one from the base to hit plus another two from the difficulty). He can only add five of those to the Tommy gun's base 5 L damage, giving him a 10d10 damage effect before applying the lion's soak!*

• **Cover:** Cover increases an attacker's difficulty to hit a target (and often the target's ability to fire back). The list below has difficulty penalties for hitting a target under various types of cover. A character who fires back from behind cover is also at a disadvantage to hit, briefly exposing himself before ducking back under protection. Ranged attacks a defender makes from under cover are at one less difficulty than listed below. (If a listed difficulty is +1, then the defender suffers no penalty to make attacks from under that cover.) Attackers firing on a target hiding behind a wall suffer +2 difficulty to ranged attack rolls, while attacks staged by the character behind the wall are at +1 difficulty.

Note that difficulties for combatants who are both under cover are cumulative. If one combatant is prone and one is behind a wall, attacks staged by the prone character and those launched by the character behind the wall are both at +2 difficulty.

| Cover Type                   | Difficulty |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Light (lying prone)          | +1         |
| Good (behind wall)           | +2         |
| Superior (only head exposed) | +3         |

• **Cover Fire:** This maneuver isn't meant to hit targets; it is used instead to force opponents to dive for cover (allowing attackers to advance, withdraw or perform some other strategic action). Cover fire is a resisted action between the attacker's dice pool and each opponent's Willpower. Each opponent who gets fewer successes than the attacker does abandons any planned action and dives for cover automatically, losing any further actions that turn. If an opponent's successes tie the attacker's, the opponent perseveres, but she takes her next action at a base +1 difficulty. If an opponent gets more successes, she steels her nerve and endures the volley. If an opponent botches, she's struck by a shot and takes the attack's base damage.

• **Multiple Shots:** An attacker may take more than one attack in a turn by declaring a multiple action (see p. 201). The attacker can take a number of shots with a firearm up to its rate of fire and can throw as many weapons as he has at hand.

**Ability:** Athletics, Firearms **Difficulty:** Normal  
**Accuracy:** Special **Damage:** Weapon

• **Range:** The Ranged Weapons Table (p. 251) lists each weapon's medium range; no modifiers apply when shooting up to this distance. Twice that listing is the weapon's maximum range. Attacks made up to maximum range are +2 difficulty. Attacks made at targets within two meters are considered point blank. Point-blank shots add two dice to the attacker's accuracy. The point-blank bonus does not apply when shooting at a target engaged in close combat (with someone other than the shooter). This indicates that the shooter has some degree of difficulty lining up the desired target.

• **Reloading:** Reloading takes one full turn and requires the character's concentration. Like any other maneuver, reloading can be performed as part of a multiple action.



• **Strafing:** Instead of aiming at one target, fully automatic weapons can be fired across an area. Strafing adds 10 dice to a standard attack roll's accuracy, suffers +2 difficulty due to weapon recoil and empties the clip. This maneuver covers a maximum of three meters.

The attacker divides any successes gained on the attack roll evenly among all targets in the covered area (successes assigned to hit an individual are also added to that target's damage effect). If only one target is within the covered area, only half the successes affect her. The attacker then assigns any leftover successes as he desires. If fewer successes are rolled than there are targets, only one may be assigned per target until they are all allocated.

Dodge rolls against strafing are at +1 difficulty.

**Ability:** Firearms

**Difficulty:** +2

**Accuracy:** +10

**Damage:** Special

• **Three-Round Burst:** The attacker gains two additional dice on a single attack roll and expends three shots from the weapon's clip. Only certain weapons may perform this maneuver; see the Ranged Weapons Table (p. 251) for particulars. The attack is made at +1 difficulty due to recoil. As with full-auto fire, the damage effect is considered a single attack when applying the target's soak.

**Ability:** Firearms

**Difficulty:** +1

**Accuracy:** +2

**Damage:** Special

• **Two Weapons:** Firing or throwing two weapons gives the attacker a distinct advantage, but has its share of complications. Doing so is considered a multiple action, complete with reduced dice pools for total attacks made and for any weapon recoil. Additionally, the attacker suffers +1 difficulty for his off-hand (unless he's ambidextrous). The attacker can take a number of shots from a firearm up to its rate of fire.

**Ability:** Athletics, Firearms

**Difficulty:** Special

**Accuracy:** Special

**Damage:** Weapon

## Maneuver Complications

The following are common combat complications. The Storyteller should add any others as the situation warrants.

• **Blinded:** Add two dice to attack rolls made against a blinded target. Furthermore, blind characters are at +2 difficulty on all sensory-related actions.

• **Dazed:** If, in a single attack, the attacker rolls a number of damage successes greater than the target's Stamina, the victim is dazed. The target must spend his next turn shaking off the attack's effects. Also, see "Unconscious."

## Defensive Maneuvers Table

| Maneuver        | Ability                               | Accuracy | Difficulty | Damage |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|----------|------------|--------|
| Block           | Brawl, Martial Arts                   | Special  | Normal     | 0 [r]  |
| Dodge           | Athletics, Martial Arts               | n/a      | Special    | 0 [r]  |
| Fully Defensive | Athletics, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee | Special  | Special    | 0 [r]  |
| Parry           | Melee                                 | Special  | Normal     | 0 [r]  |

## Close Combat Maneuvers Table

| Maneuver         | Ability                    | Accuracy | Difficulty | Damage      |
|------------------|----------------------------|----------|------------|-------------|
| Clinch           | Brawl, Martial Arts        | Normal   | Normal     | Str + 2 [c] |
| Disarm           | Martial Arts, Melee        | Normal   | Special    | Special     |
| Hold             | Brawl, Martial Arts        | Normal   | Normal     | 0 [c]       |
| Kick             | Brawl, Martial Arts        | Normal   | +1         | Str + 4     |
| Multiple Attacks | Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee | Special  | Special    | Special     |
| Strike           | Brawl, Martial Arts        | Normal   | Normal     | Str + 2     |
| Sweep            | Martial Arts, Melee        | Normal   | Normal     | Special [k] |
| Tackle           | Brawl                      | Normal   | +1         | Str + 3 [k] |
| Throw            | Brawl, Martial Arts        | Normal   | +1         | Special [k] |
| Weapon Strike    | Melee                      | Normal   | Normal     | Weapon      |

## Ranged Combat Maneuvers Table

| Maneuver          | Ability             | Accuracy | Difficulty | Damage      |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------|------------|-------------|
| Aiming            | Archery, Firearms   | Special  | Normal     | Weapon      |
| Automatic Fire    | Firearms            | +10      | +2         | Special [a] |
| Multiple Shots    | Athletics, Firearms | Special  | Normal     | Weapon      |
| Strafing          | Firearms            | +10      | +2         | Special [a] |
| Three-Round Burst | Firearms            | +2       | +1         | Special     |
| Two Weapons       | Athletics, Firearms | Special  | Special    | Weapon      |

[a] — The maneuver requires at least a half-full ammunition clip.

[c] — The maneuver carries over on successive turns.

[k] — The maneuver causes knockdown.

[r] — The maneuver reduces an opponent's attack successes.



- **Immobilization:** Add two dice to attack rolls made on an immobilized (i.e., held by someone or something) but still struggling target. Attacks hit automatically if the target is completely immobilized (tied up or otherwise paralyzed).

- **Knockdown:** Quite simply, the victim falls down. After suffering a knockdown, the subject makes an Athletics roll. If successful, he may get back on his feet immediately, but his initiative drops by two in the next turn. On a failed roll, the subject spends his next action climbing to his feet (see "Get Up," p. 187), if he chooses to rise. On a botch, he lands particularly hard or at a severe angle, taking an automatic health level of bashing damage.

Maneuvers such as tackle, throw and sweep are intended to knock an opponent down. However, an especially powerful attack of any kind may send the target to the ground. Such instances are best left to the Storyteller's discretion and should occur only when appropriately cinematic or suitable to the story.

- **Unconscious:** If, in a single attack, the attacker rolls a number of damage successes greater than the target's Stamina + 2, the victim blacks out. Unconsciousness lasts from five turns to an entire scene (specific duration is at the Storyteller's discretion).

## Armored Combat

Vehicle combat systems differ from those of personal combat in only two notable ways: damage effect and maneuvers. The weaponry involved in vehicle combat does a significantly higher amount of damage, and the character directs a craft's maneuvers instead of performing them himself. Otherwise, initiative, attacks and resolution are handled in the same way as with personal combat. The only other distinction applies when personal combat and armored combat conflict — as when a group of characters takes on a tank or a plane. Under these circumstances, the individuals resolve their actions before any vehicles do.

Mounted combat (e.g., on camel- or horseback) uses the armored combat maneuvers, but attacks are typically based on personal-scale weapons.

## Damage and Armor Adds

Vehicle weapons are designed to deal significant amounts of damage to targets (usually other vehicles, buildings and other durable structures). A craft can also take more punishment than a person can. Essentially, people and vehicles fight on different scales.

To reflect this, vehicle armament has "damage adds," while vehicles themselves have "armor adds." A damage add is listed in brackets next to a weapon's damage effect (e.g., 5 [10] L), while an armor add is bracketed after the vehicle's soak (e.g., 4 [5]). Armor adds are applied against both bashing and lethal damage.

The damage add is the number of damage successes inflicted automatically. If a personal weapon is fired at a vehicle, the armor add is the number of dice subtracted from the

weapon's damage effect. (Unlike a normal soak, if this reduction lowers the attack's damage effect to zero, no damage roll is made; the damage bounces off the armor without effect.)

When one vehicle fires on another, the damage and armor adds are ignored. Instead, the weapon's base damage effect and the vehicle's base soak are figured normally. This system reflects that artillery and armor are specifically designed to inflict and resist huge amounts of punishment, while still keeping dice pools to manageable totals.

The damage in vehicle combat is applied just like in personal combat. While the systems are identical, a damaged truck isn't the same as a damaged person. Refer to the Appendix, page 253, for specifics on vehicle weapons and applying damage to vehicles.

## Collision

A vehicle that collides with a pedestrian, another vehicle or some other object inflicts one die of lethal damage per 10 kph of speed. Base damage for large and/or heavy vehicles such as a large truck or a tank may be increased by a die or two.

## Vehicle Maneuvers

Vehicles can perform a variety of maneuvers; dice actions usually come into play when the character steering the craft is either closing on or avoiding another vehicle.

A character uses Animal Handling to guide animals, Drive to steer ground vehicles and Pilot to control air- or watercraft. Animals, ground vehicles and surface watercraft can only perform spin and turn maneuvers. Aircraft and submersible watercraft may perform all the listed maneuvers unless otherwise indicated. The Storyteller may allow new maneuvers as she sees fit.

- **Climb:** The pilot heads up. Ascent can range from a slow climb to a sharp-angled ascent. The Storyteller may apply a +1 or +2 difficulty for a sharp climb, since such a maneuver involves high G-forces (for aircraft) or sudden changes in water pressure (for submersibles).

- **Dive:** The opposite of a climb; the vehicle plummets downward. The Storyteller may apply a difficulty to the die roll for a hard dive due to G-force or pressure, as with a sharp climb.

- **Loop:** The character makes a vertical loop, ending up in roughly the same position that she started in at the beginning of the move. Difficulty depends on the loop's tightness, usually between +1 and +3.

- **Roll:** The character flips upside down (and usually right-side up again). Repeated rolls are possible (a "corkscrew") with increasing difficulty, at the Storyteller's discretion. Only aircraft and kayaks may try this maneuver.

- **Spin:** If traveling at no greater than one-half speed, the driver can rotate the vehicle or mount in a very tight turn, thereby turning around or even spinning in a complete circle. Ground vehicles, animals, autogyros and hovercraft may perform this maneuver. Conventional fixed-wing aircraft and aquatic craft cannot change direction without covering appreciable distance and must use the turn maneuver instead.



• **Turn:** Anything from a casual left to a severe swerve or U-turn. The Storyteller may assign difficulties depending on the turn's sharpness.

## Health

This section deals with your character's current physical or mental state, as well as various factors that can improve or worsen these conditions. Health can be affected by anything that injures the body or the mind, such as simple lack of sleep, mental assault or a bullet to the head. Depending on his condition, a character's current health can greatly impede his ability to perform even the simplest of tasks.

## The Health Chart

The health chart on the character sheet helps you track your character's current physical condition. It also lists the penalty imposed on your dice pool for each level of injury that your character sustains. As your character suffers more injuries, his health declines until he becomes incapacitated — or dead.

Every character has seven health levels ranging from Bruised to Incapacitated. Storyteller characters known as "extras" are an exception; see Chapter Eight: Heroes and Villains (p. 244). (The step beyond Incapacitated is Dead, which isn't really a health level at all.) When an attacker scores a success on a damage roll, your character takes one health level of damage. This damage is marked on your character sheet in the appropriate box, although the mark you make depends on the type of damage inflicted (see "Applying Damage," below).

The number to the left of the lowest marked box indicates your current dice penalty. As your character gets battered further, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to perform even the simplest of tasks. The dice penalty is subtracted from your dice pool for every action (except damage effect and soak) until the wound heals.

The penalty also indicates impaired movement, translating into the number of meters by which your character's movement is divided. Further, your character can no longer sprint when at Wounded or below. A character with Dexterity 3 who's at Maimed can walk only one meter a turn or can run five meters. At Crippled, your character can only walk (or crawl) one meter per turn.

| Health Level  | Dice/Move Penalty | Description  |
|---------------|-------------------|--|
| Bruised       | 0                 | Slightly battered, suffering no penalties.                         |
| Hurt          | -1                | Some scrapes and bumps; not seriously impaired.                    |
| Injured       | -1                | Minor injuries; noticeable damage.                                 |
| Wounded       | -2                | Significant damage; can no longer sprint.                          |
| Maimed        | -3                | A bloody mess; can only hobble about.                              |
| Crippled      | -4                | Catastrophically injured; simply moving is difficult.              |
| Incapacitated |                   | Incapable of movement or action; fade in and out of consciousness. |

Incapacitation differs from unconsciousness in that

the character collapses from the combined effects of physical trauma and pain. He falls to the ground and remains in a hazy state of consciousness only with a successful Willpower roll (dice penalty due to injury applies). The character remains practically comatose until his health recovers to Wounded. Successful medical treatment that restores at least one health level can bring him around before this.

If a character takes any damage beyond the seven full health levels listed, he dies (see below for specifics on applying damage). Medicine being what it is in the early 20th century, a trained professional has little chance of resuscitating him. The character is beyond help after a number of turns equal to his Stamina.

## Applying Damage

There are two damage types in **Adventure**. Bashing damage includes all forms of temporary injury. Lethal damage covers permanent, deadly wounds. All injuries are cumulative, whether lethal or bashing, and the combined injury determines your character's current health level. See below for specifics on each damage type.

When your character takes bashing damage, it's recorded as a slash ("/") in the appropriate health chart box.

Lethal damage is marked with an "X" for each level inflicted. Lethal damage always gets marked above bashing. So, if you mark a level of bashing damage in the Bruised box and your character takes one lethal health level later on, "move down" the bashing level to the Hurt box by marking that box with a "/." The lethal level is then noted by drawing another slash through the Bruised box, turning it into an "X." Bashing levels taken after lethal levels are simply drawn in on the next open box. Bashing damage isn't as severe as lethal, so it's always marked last and healed first.

|               |    |                                     |
|---------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| Bruised       | -0 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Hurt          | -1 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Injured       | -1 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Wounded       | -2 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Maimed        | -3 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Crippled      | -4 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Incapacitated |    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**Example:** *Whitley Styles has already taken a level of bashing damage from a Red Assassin's glancing strike (Styles' player marks his health chart with a "/" in the Bruised box). Then another assassin hits with a wicked throwing star, inflicting three lethal health levels! Styles' chart is marked with an "X" in the Bruised, Hurt and Injured health levels and a "/" in the Wounded box (essentially moving the punch's damage down the chart). The combined damage puts Whitley at -2 dice to all rolls. Styles sees he's outmatched and runs for the labyrinth's exit.*

|               |    |                                     |
|---------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| Bruised       | -0 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Hurt          | -1 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Injured       | -1 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Wounded       | -2 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Maimed        | -3 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Crippled      | -4 | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Incapacitated |    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |



## Bashing Damage

Bashing damage covers all forms of injury that aren't likely to kill instantly or that fade relatively quickly. Most forms of hand-to-hand combat inflict bashing damage, as do mental "injuries" such as headaches, drunkenness or other psychological distractions. Bashing damage generally impairs less than lethal damage does, and it heals faster.

Your character *can* die from bashing damage, though. A punch may not cause as much trauma as a bullet does, but enough punches can kill. After your character reaches Incapacitated on the health chart, each new bashing injury, while soaked like a normal bashing effect, is marked with a second slash on the highest bashing level. This way, bashing levels turn progressively into lethal damage. Once your character's health chart is filled to Incapacitated with lethal damage, the next level of damage taken, whether bashing or lethal, kills him.

**Example:** *Whitley Styles, suffering from three lethal levels and one bashing level of damage, faces a dead end! The assassins from the Temple of the Red Blade are on him in an instant, attacking in a flurry of blows until Styles blacks out (inflicting three more bashing health levels — /, /, /). He's at Incapacitated with four bashing damage levels left.*

*Whitley Styles' merciless opponents then smash his prone body with punches and kicks. The first hit after he falls to Incapacitated causes one level of bashing damage. So Styles' Wounded level, previously bashing, has another slash drawn through it (for "X"), making it lethal. This process can be repeated three more times until Whitley's remaining health levels are changed from bashing to lethal. Regardless of whether it's bashing or lethal, the fourth level of damage will kill him!*

If your character falls to Incapacitated due to bashing damage but then takes a level of lethal damage, he's dead.

## Lethal Damage

Lethal damage is intended to cause immediate and grievous injury. Blades and bullets alike cause lethal wounds. Such injuries don't heal easily, and they usually require medical attention for any hope of recovery. Nature, too, provides numerous health hazards. Electricity, fire, certain toxins, even long falls, can cause lethal wounds.

Lethal damage kills with ruthless efficiency. When your character's health chart fills to Incapacitated with lethal damage, any further damage taken, whether bashing or lethal, kills him.

## Soak

As noted above, bashing damage isn't as immediately fatal as lethal damage is; bashing damage also heals more quickly (see "Recovery," below). The human body can take more punishment from bashing damage than it can from lethal effects. Use your character's full Stamina rating to soak bashing attacks. You cannot use Stamina to soak lethal effects.

Certain types of artificial armor, certain Knacks and some super-science inventions protect against bashing and lethal at-

tacks. Simply add relevant armor rating to your character's soak score (see "Armor," p. 253, for specific ratings).

## Recovery

Minor injuries simply require time to heal. Medical attention is required to recover from serious levels of bashing damage or from any form of lethal damage. If your character reaches Crippled, whether from bashing or lethal damage, he must seek professional help!

The accompanying charts list the time involved in healing damage. Bashing and lethal damage recover differently. Recovery Time lists how long it takes to heal that specific health level; the time is cumulative. An adventurer who takes three levels of bashing damage needs one hour to heal each one before he's fully fit. If a character suffers five lethal damage levels, it takes one month to recover from Maimed to Wounded. After that, the character needs an additional three weeks and four days in total to recover from the remaining lethal damage. Since bashing damage heals first, an adventurer who takes four levels of lethal damage and one of bashing needs three hours to recover the bashing level *before* he starts recovering from the lethal wounds.

These recovery times assume the individual receives only basic care (first aid and bed rest). The times improve if the individual has access to modern health care. If he's treated by a trained physician (Medicine 2 Ability rating) in a decently-equipped hospital or clinic, the character heals each health level at one category higher on the health chart. If the character is lucky enough to enjoy treatment by a medical genius (Ability mastery in Medicine), he heals each health level at two categories higher on the health chart. If the patient forgoes special treatment at any point, he returns to healing at normal rates.

No matter the quality of the treatment process involved, each level of bashing damage still takes at least one hour to heal, and lethal damage still takes a minimum of one day to heal.

**Example:** *Just as things look most dire for Whitley Styles, Max Mercer and Annabelle Lee Newfield arrive to drive off the Red Assassins. They take Styles to the nearby British consulate, where the head physician, an old friend of Max's, tends to Whitley's injuries (he has taken lethal damage to Wounded and bashing damage to Incapacitated).*

*Thanks to the physician's skill and his clinic's medical resources, Styles heals everything one category more quickly. He heals the Incapacitated bashing level in six hours instead of 12, the Crippled bashing level in three hours instead of six and the Maimed bashing level in one hour instead of three. Styles then heals his Wounded lethal level in one week instead of two weeks, his Injured lethal level three days instead of one week and his Hurt lethal level in one day instead of three. However, his Bruised lethal level still takes one day to heal.*

*In short, Whitley Styles recovers completely in 12 days and 10 hours. If he had survived but not received steady medical care, it would have taken 25 days and 21 hours to heal fully.*



## Healing Bashing Damage

Bashing damage up to the Wounded level can be cared for without medical skill; these wounds heal on their own, without treatment. Bashing damage beyond Wounded may have deeper consequences. Your character's vision or hearing may be altered due to a concussion, he may suffer excruciating pain from internal bruising or experience some other extreme discomfort. Receiving adequate medical attention negates these effects.

### Health Level

#### RecoveryTime

|                    |             |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Bruised to Wounded | One hour    |
| Maimed             | Three hours |
| Crippled           | Six hours   |
| Incapacitated      | 12 hours    |

Once bashing levels reach Incapacitated, any further bashing wounds are X'd over previous ones, making them lethal (see "Bashing Damage"). At that point, recovery is handled as lethal damage.

## Healing Lethal Damage

Lethal damage of any sort can be deadly — that's why it's called lethal! Lethal wounds that go unattended may continue bleeding until your character passes out and dies from blood loss. Other dangers can also arise from infection, poisoning or broken limbs.

Any lethal damage past Hurt requires medical treatment to prevent further harm. Untreated lethal wounds worsen by one level of lethal damage per day. When your character sustains lethal damage down to Incapacitated, he's one health level away from death. If he takes one more wound (whether bashing or lethal), he dies.

If your character is at Maimed or higher, he may recover with rest over the times listed below. However, if he is Crippled or Incapacitated, no recovery is possible unless he receives medical attention. Indeed, at Incapacitated your character is comatose at worse and delirious at best, and he could still die.

### Health Level

#### RecoveryTime

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| Bruised       | One day     |
| Hurt          | Three days  |
| Injured       | One week    |
| Wounded       | Two weeks   |
| Maimed        | One month   |
| Crippled      | Two months  |
| Incapacitated | Four months |

## Sources of Injury

It's a hostile world out there. Fire, electricity, raging seas, sheer cliffs — these are just a few of the challenges the Inspired face beyond the more obvious of a palooka's fist or a mad scientist's electromagneto rifle.

Some sources of injury require rolling a damage effect, while others inflict damage on the subject automatically. If a system states that the Storyteller "rolls damage effect," treat the damage like an attack (including applying soak as appropriate). If it says the character "takes a health level," he takes the damage automatically, regardless of any defenses.

If your character suffers significant amounts of injury from a source listed below (being reduced to Incapacitated), he may suffer permanent damage. This can be physical impairment (reduced Physical Attributes), permanent memory loss, brain damage (reduced Mental or Social Attributes) or disfigurement (reduced Appearance). Specifics are up to the Storyteller and should be appropriate to the circumstances.

### Disease

Despite the best efforts of science in the new century, illness and disease remain all too common. For game purposes, colds and disease apply as bashing damage. A fever or flu inflicts one or two bashing health levels, while more serious viruses or diseases (malaria, plague) can be more devastating, even inflicting lethal damage.

The Storyteller decides the exact effects (including altered perception and delirium) of severe sicknesses. Permanent Attribute reductions may even occur. Resistance can help combat infection and sickness, reducing the damage sustained or at least shortening the length of the illness. The Storyteller should adjust appropriately.

### Electrocution

In these times of poorly insulated wires and haphazard safety measures, electricity is a constant danger. The strength of the electrical flow determines the amount of lethal damage your character takes from electrocution. Each turn, he suffers the damage effect noted below, until contact with the source is severed (not always easy to do, since electrocution tends to contract the victim's muscles, locking him in place as the current flows through his body).

Electrical damage is a lethal effect, and artificial armor doesn't protect against it (depending on the particular nature of the defense, the circumstance and the Storyteller's decision).

#### Damage Effect

#### Electrical Source

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 2 | Minor; wall socket                    |
| 4 | Major; protective fence               |
| 6 | Severe; vehicle battery, junction box |
| 8 | Fatal; main feed line, subway rail    |



## Falling

The Storyteller rolls one die of bashing damage for every three meters (rounded down) that your character falls before hitting something solid. However, on a controlled fall, roll Athletics; each success equals one meter that your character may fall before suffering injury. With two successes, your character could drop five meters before taking a die of bashing damage — however, if he fell eight meters, he would take two dice.

Falling damage may be soaked as normal, but the Storyteller always rolls at least one die. Each success inflicts a level of bashing damage. Landing on sharp objects can change the damage from bashing to lethal, at the Storyteller's discretion.

If your character plummets 30 meters or more, he reaches terminal velocity. The damage effect is 10 dice regardless of any Athletics roll and is considered lethal damage. Any armor your character wears in a terminal-velocity fall functions at one-third its rating (rounded down), since it's not designed for this sort of thing.

## Fire

A fire's size and fuel determine the amount of lethal damage your character endures. He suffers the damage effect each turn that he's in contact with the flames; he must leave the area and/or put out any fire on him to stop taking damage. Fire damage is a lethal effect that may ignore armor (depending on the particular nature of the defense, the circumstance and the Storyteller's decision).

| Damage Effect | Types of Fire      |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 2             | Lighter, hot poker |
| 4             | Coal fire          |
| 5             | Bonfire            |
| 6             | Welding torch      |
| 7             | Raging inferno     |
| Fire type x 2 | Chemical fire      |

If your character falls to Maimed, the fire scars him temporarily (reduce Appearance by one until he recovers to Bruised). If he suffers more damage in the fire, he is scarred permanently.

## Material Strengths

Combat in this genre inevitably involves someone being thrown through a window, smashed through a wall, buried under rubble and the like. To simulate this cinematic excess, we provide a chart with various substances' protection ratings and structural levels.

If someone slams into an object, that substance suffers the same damage effect the target did. If that damage exceeds the barrier's soak, it breaks but stops the person's forward progress. If it reduces the object's structural levels to zero, it turns to rubble and collapses on the poor soul or shatters apart and lets him continue onward, depending on what's most appropriate to the barrier and the scene.

| Material           | Structural Levels | Soak<br>(per cubic meter) |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Glass              | 2                 | 0                         |
| Ice                | 3                 | 2                         |
| Wood               | 5                 | 3                         |
| Stone, soft metals | 8-9               | 5                         |
| Hard metals        | 10                | 6+                        |

This chart is also handy for knowing how much damage a barrier must sustain before it's destroyed. In such cases, the substance can be targeted with attacks to reduce its structural levels.

## Radiation

Radiation covers the broad range of energy emissions that surround and penetrate everything. All things reflect and create a certain amount of radiation; life requires it, but too much radiation can kill. It isn't common in the mid-1920s in any concentration that would inflict immediate harm. For the purposes of game play, radiation is divided into two simple categories: soft radiation and hard radiation.

Victims of large or extended radiation doses may suffer cancer, hair loss, brittle bones, mental problems and other debilitating effects.

• **Soft Radiation:** This category includes types of radiation that bombard humanity every day in small doses (radio waves, microwaves, infrared, visible light and near UV). High doses can cause sickness and even physical injury. A character suffers one bashing health level for each turn that he is exposed to high doses of soft radiation.

• **Hard Radiation:** This category encompasses any radiation that can ionize, from hard UV on up through gamma rays, X-rays and cosmic rays. Even minimal doses can be lethal. A character suffers one lethal health level for each turn that he's exposed to hard radiation.

## Suffocation and Drowning

Your character can hold her breath 30 seconds for each point in his Endurance dice pool (default to Stamina). After this duration, you must roll Endurance each turn (at increasing difficulty; see "Feats of Endurance," p. 188). When you fail a roll, your character suffers one bashing health level of damage. Your character automatically suffers a level of bashing damage every 30 seconds after your first failed Endurance roll, until he can breathe again. After reaching Incapacitated, your character dies if he is not resuscitated (this requires at least Medicine 1).

## Temperature Extremes

When exposed to dangerously high (35° Celsius or higher) or low (-10° Celsius or lower) temperatures, your character suffers one lethal health level for every day in that environment. Your character cannot recover this damage until he gets to a more hospitable climate. The damage rate increases if the temperature exceeds the survivable range (say, inside a freezer, where the temperature can drop as low as -20° C).





## Mental States

The human mind is a mystery to scientists and physicians in the 20th century, but they understand that certain mental conditions can be more disabling than “mere” physical injury is. A physically healthy person who suffers from a mental derangement can become a danger to herself and others. Not a few masterminds of the era suffer from some form of mental illness. The Storyteller ultimately judges the effects of mental illness on a character.

Stress, chemical imbalances and traumatic events can cause mental illness. **Adventure** characters, while certainly a cut above the norm, are not immune to such dangers. The list below has a selection of mental disorders.

- **Amnesia:** The subject forgets a significant segment of his past due to physical trauma or mental scarring. This affliction can be so acute as to erase all memories or simply cause him to forget a few hours of time.
- **Delusions:** The character’s mind plays tricks on itself. He experiences things that don’t actually exist. Mild cases can be distracting, while potent delusions can cause a complete detachment from reality.

- **Multiple Personality Disorder:** Trauma can cause a single personality to splinter into distinct shards. Each personality has its own Nature and behaves differently from the others.

- **Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder:** The subject cannot resist a certain urge. This urge may cause him to perform ludicrous or repetitive tasks or to seek absolute perfection in every detail.

- **Phobia:** An irrational, even disabling, fear of something. There’s a phobia for pretty much anything you can imagine, including claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces), arachnophobia (fear of spiders), auto-phobia (fear of oneself) and on and on and on....

- **Polar/Bipolar Disorder:** Also known as depression, polar disorder causes lethargy, melancholy and an inability to function in normal society for months at a time. Manic-depressives suffer the same symptoms, but their bouts are interspersed with energetic bursts.

- **Schizophrenia:** This affliction causes a complete detachment from reality. Acute cases of paranoid schizophrenia are accompanied by severe delusions of persecution and elaborate paranoid theories.



# CHAPTER

## ROLEPLAYING

# SEVEN

This chapter discusses aspects of roleplaying on both sides — player and Storyteller — and offers suggestions that may improve one's game. None of this is presented as word from on high or tablets from the mountain. It's simply advice on playing the game and getting the most from it. If you find issues that you hadn't considered before, then it's done its job.

Much of the discussion covers details of pulp genre conventions and ways to make your **Adventure** series more like the pulp stories that inspired it. Although **Adventure** is not a generic pulp setting, these conventions still have a bearing on the way the world in **Adventure** works, at least for characters and their nemeses.

## The Team

Pulp adventures often revolve around teams — Doc Savage and his associates are a great example of a pulp team, even if the good Doc is a wee bit more capable than his companions. What every character has is a schtick, something unique that he can do that the others can't. It's true that Doc Savage could do everything his team could, but he can't be everywhere at once.

A character team in **Adventure** can include characters with mental powers, gadgets, physical gifts and a host of incredible resources. The potential variety available to players — both superhuman and mundane — are broad enough that a team need not have too much overlap. Certainly, some overlap is necessary; what's a good pulp action game without the manly art of fisticuffs or some pulse-pounding gunplay?

## Creating a Team

Before players set out to create characters, they should first discuss what sort of team they wish to play. The Storyteller should also discuss what sort of series she expects to run. With the preliminary decisions out of the way, the players need to decide who will fill what role in the team and work to give their characters complimentary traits. This isn't absolutely necessary, but it makes the game more fun in the long run.

Before deciding who plays what role, keep in mind that although the characters aren't two-dimensional superheroes, they are larger than life. A world class chemist, the best lawyer in the United States and the finest mechanical engineer on three continents are the rule, not the exception.

## Character Overlap

Be careful about characters with similar fortes. If they overlap too closely, one player may be left with little to do — especially if the other player's character is more competent in the area in question. In such a situation, it's best if the players work out key ways in which their respective concepts differ.

For example, two players decide to create similar characters — Bryan creates John Quinn, Private Investigator and Dan creates Calvin Burroughs, Investigative Reporter. Each character's focus is on investigations and digging up dirt and facts as needed.

The Storyteller asks Bryan and Dan what distinguishes their characters from each other — how can they operate together without duplication of effort or one overshadowing the other? Bryan elaborates — John Quinn knows the streets and the people who live on them. He can hook up with the beat cop or the mob stool pigeon who knows just the right information to help his investigation. Through his clients, he knows people who have other connections and might be able to get favors from them if needed.

Dan, on the other hand, explains that Calvin Burroughs is big on high society doings and gossip. He knows where all the big parties happen and who's who in the social register. Calvin's not all fluff, though. After all, he's broken some big-time stories thanks to his own connections.

This specialization works out well for everyone. Calvin can use his contacts to get into places and meet people that John can't get close to, but John has a better idea of what's going on down in the streets.

## Team Focus

Are the characters members of an archeological team, seeking out lost treasures in forgotten cities in the world's trackless wastes? Do the characters fight those criminals who see themselves as above the law and, thus, above reproach?

The decision about what the team does and why it exists influences heavily the character roles available. An ace pilot fits in very well with the archeologists, while a daredevil reporter is appropriate to the crimefighters. The roles don't have to be restricted to a few archetypes — both of the previous examples would work in either team — but the team's purpose can help focus what players choose.



Possibilities include:

## Scientists

Science in **Adventure** is painted in broad strokes, with exciting colors. A scientific team is the type to explore Antarctica or the deepest jungles of South America. Characters could include reporters, pilots, archaeologists, bodyguards and scientists of just about any specialty. Characters that can enter and survive (and thrive in) the hidden lands are certainly desirable in such a team.

Scientists who explore other directions — those who attempt to understand the secrets of the atom or the birth of stars — work just as well. Any scientist who makes headway in such areas will be rightfully concerned about unscrupulous criminals or demagogues who wish to use the technology for their own benefit, rather than for humanitarian reasons.

Professor Dixon and Doctor Primoris of the *Æon Society* are examples of very different scientists.

## Two-Fisted Dealers of Justice

The characters band together out of a common desire to fight crime and injustice across the globe or, perhaps, just in their home town. Such characters make ideal “mystery men” of the classic sort, and overlap is less likely to cause trouble than with other types of teams. At least one investigator would be appropriate, and worldly contacts are essential. The characters should be tightly connected with whatever circles they travel through, whether as friends or enemies.

Inter-character conflicts can derive from methodology. Two characters may disagree on whether it’s ap-

propriate to act “outside the law” when dealing with enemies who really are above the law. Such conflicts can be fun if they don’t bog the game down. Interpersonal conflict occurred in pulp adventure, but when it came time to get down to business, the heroes put aside their personal squabbles.

From the *Æon Society*’s membership, some examples include Jake “Danger Ace” Stefokowski, Safari Jack Tallon and Annabelle Lee Newfield.

## Dilettantes

The young millionaire, his college friends and his fiancée look for excitement in what they find to be an otherwise boring life. How they go about seeking excitement can range from financing an anti-piracy expedition in the South Pacific to looking for lost cities to any of the other types of teams described here. In fact, they could investigate a smuggling ring in one story and go on an expedition to the Nile’s source for the next. The motivations should probably be deeper than “I’m bored with my humdrum existence,” but that could plausibly be at the heart of it.

Such characters might not be very worldly, as they’ve not yet experienced much of what the world has to offer. They could start sheltered and unaware of the depth of the risks they’re taking. The course of the series might lead to personal growth and awareness of the greater world — amid pulse-pounding and blood-curdling action sequences.

While not strictly a dilettante, Maxwell Mercer easily falls into several categories — he’s an investigator, a scientist, even, when the need presents itself, a two-





fisted dispenser of manly justice. Consider the possibility of characters that fit into two or more roles — the polymath is a valid pulp archetype.

## Investigators

Whether they work for a government, a newspaper or as private citizens, investigators often find themselves getting into the weirdest trouble. Characters designed for a team of investigators should cover a broad variety of fields to maximize their ability to dig up information and put it to use. Of course, the act of getting that information is likely to stir up some hornets' nests, which requires they have the ability to defend themselves when necessary.

Sarah Gettel and Whitley Styles are two examples of very different investigators.

## Social Reformers

Antagonists — whether true heartless villains or terribly misguided souls — can unfold schemes that lead to all sorts of social problems. Such issues cannot be solved with gunplay and a few fistfights. Physical conflict may occur in the course of the story, but the heart of the matter involves dealing with larger matters, philosophies and ideals that can't be taken down with a sock to the jaw.

Social reformers look for ways to combat the root cause, not just the visible symptoms. Characters who engage in social reform typically start at a level villains often neglect and work upward. They get into the gears of society and throw sand where needed, spying on villainous organizations or even infiltrating them to better understand them. For example, people tend to get into crime because they're otherwise economically disadvantaged. What happens to an army of henchmen and thugs when honest work is simply more profitable? In a similar vein, the social reformer can work from within a villain's organization to spread disinformation and confusion to render the villain ineffectual.

This type of character (and storytelling for that character) requires a very mentally and socially intensive style of play. This isn't to say that the character can't or won't fight when necessary, but he looks for ways to stack the deck against his opponent before he does.

Super-science also has a place for this type of character — the social reformer can use it to diagnose and solve the above problems far more efficiently than any normal person can.

## The Ensemble Cast

A group with a large number of players who can't all be present every week presents a problem for any game. The solution is for the game to accommodate a shifting cast. The best way to handle this is through an episodic format. Some Storytellers may play an absent player's character or give it to someone else to play. Both of these can be unsatisfactory for a player who returns to find that his character "died heroically saving the group from certain doom" or

simply behaved in a manner completely outside his vision of that character. Either can ruin a player's enjoyment of the series. Fortunately, it's possible to minimize or avoid this problem with simple preparation.

One option is to ask players to write a short personality description — enough to give basics on how the character would behave. This reference makes life easier for the Storyteller or a stand-in player. If inconsistencies are unavoidable, perhaps that could be worked into the story — "Dr. Mesmero's Mind Control Ray pushed him to do that!" or "Your character wouldn't ever do that, you're right! It appears your character wasn't even there; the Chameleon impersonated him!"

Another option is to maintain a common "stable" of characters. Some characters necessarily belong to certain players (specifically those who can make every session), while others are given to players who are present only occasionally. The stable could have two character tiers; the primary characters specific to a given player and a secondary supporting cast, possibly made up of allies, contacts, followers or mentors (from primary characters' Backgrounds). As above, the secondary characters should have a brief personality description. One item to keep in mind is that "secondary" doesn't have to mean "inferior." For an ensemble game like this, try to keep secondary characters on a relatively even footing with primaries, so the latter don't lord it over the rest. This may be less satisfactory in the long-term but can make it easy to bring a new player in quickly.

The main difficulty with this kind of play is working cliffhangers into the story (see p. 195). If a player can't make the next session, it makes it difficult to follow up on, say, whether he survives the fall from the zeppelin into the jungle. Still, difficult doesn't mean impossible — say the character falls and the player misses the next session. The other characters continue on their mission to its conclusion, their comrade's fate a mystery. Meanwhile, the lost character finds his way back to civilization just in time to show up for the player's next appearance at a group session.

Just *how* the character gets back can be handled in a number of ways, from simple "blue-booking" to full roleplay. The Storyteller might reward the player with an experience point or two if the player writes a brief narrative of his exploit and/or has his character relate his daring adventure in the next session. Alternatively, the Storyteller might develop an entire episode around the character, with the other players taking on brief roles as secondary characters for the duration.

## Leaping into Action!

Any group of characters is ideally dripping with enough plot hooks to keep the Storyteller up at nights thinking of stories for the team each game session. However, it's not necessary for the Storyteller to drive the action. It's perfectly viable for characters to go off into



their own escapades without grabbing any hooks the Storyteller left strewn about the landscape. To be fair, if the players want to run off chasing pirates in the South Pacific rather than follow up on Doctor Zorbo's machinations for the foreseeable future, it's generally best to inform the Storyteller in advance and give her time to get her material in order.

### Shared History

A good team gets together for a common reason. What if everyone in the team has a "shadowy enemy"? The player group can outline some historical (for the characters) issues that they want to follow up on. With sufficient warning, a good Storyteller can use such hooks to good effect.

Shared history is a big part of pulp teams — even if the characters didn't literally spend that time together, the fact that they have elements of history in common can unify things greatly. It's harder to deal with a coherent series if every character has a different archenemy upon whom he's sworn undying vengeance. If players do the latter, the Storyteller is within her rights to work them all into a larger plot.

Leaving "blank spots" to fill in later is also valid. Some players are more comfortable adding to character history during play rather than mapping it all out before the first session. A variation on this is to leave blank spots open for the Storyteller to fill and see what she comes up with.

### Connections

Characters can know each other before Inspiration strikes. It's probably easier to gather up a group who already has reason to know/like/trust one another than it is to grab a random sampling of folks lacking any prior association. The probability of such exceptional people knowing each other before they become "exceptional" is not worth stress. Coincidence and plot twists abound in pulp serials, and there's no reason to leave it out of *Adventure*. Consider that the two most influential people in the *Æon* Continuum, Maxwell Mercer and Michael Donighal, knew each other for years before they were both changed by Hammersmith's experiment.

The characters don't have to be old friends or long lost pals. They might be former enemies who have banded together to face a threat greater than that they see in each other. They could all be siblings raised apart from civilization and trained intensively to save the world for democracy. If the series has one or more main villains, it's even possible that the characters worked for one those villains in the past and have united to stop his evil ways.

### In the End...

The game is the most fun when everyone takes part. The more you bring to your character and to the team as a whole, the more fun the experience is for everyone. Use the team concept to open possibilities for the play-

ers and the Storyteller. Also, keep in mind that it doesn't have to be perfect right off the bat. Some concepts take a while to form fully — use roleplay to fill in gaps left over from character creation. Character creation can be an ongoing process — a character's history, or the team's, need not be set in stone with the first session. What if, five sessions in, the players start "reminiscing" in-character about something their characters did before the game even started? The information gained is great stuff that the Storyteller can pull into play later. Use the characters — and their team — to add depth and texture to the game world.

### Storyteller: The Doc Savage Problem

An *Adventure* series bears many similarities to pulp stories and movies, but it must diverge in one important area. Many of the best films and tales revolve around a single hero and his sidekicks. Consider again the generally delightful stories of Doc Savage. Yes, the good doctor's friends are all accomplished scientists, fighters and technicians, but the stories are fundamentally *about* Doc Savage. The other characters are really just extras and foils for him. (The same could be said of the Shadow, the Phantom or almost any other pulp character.) This set up works great for pulp serial fiction; it probably will not work so well as a series for *Adventure* — the players who get stuck running bit parts are likely to get bored with their limited roles.

The information in this section on team building helps address this consideration for the players as a whole. It certainly has a direct impact on episode design for the Storyteller as well. Unless you run a one-on-one game, you should *never* put all of the episode's important plot elements in one character's hands. Spread around the information and the emotional impact. Sure, maybe only Ace Borgstrom can stop Doctor Nefarious' insidious scheme. Instead of having the evil veterinarian kidnap Ace's girlfriend Stacy, have Doctor Nefarious hypnotize Jane Rocket's scientist fiancé Earl to help with his dastardly plan. In this way, you bring both characters equally into the plot.

Heaven help you if you go one step further and make the center of all activity a *Storyteller* character instead of one of the player's characters! Players hate this, and rightly so. They didn't schlep over to your apartment on a Wednesday night to listen to you tell them how Dex Caster saves their bacon this week. Players are an ornery bunch; *they* want to play out the adventures, and *they* want to save the world. If your story doesn't allow for the players' characters to be at its center, then you either need to rethink your Storytelling style or go into fiction writing instead of running roleplaying games.



## The World of Adventure

You can find lots of description of the game world earlier in this book. Below is some reference meant to provoke ideas in players and Storytellers in formulating their series.

### The Real World

The *Æon Continuum* (that is, the shared setting for *Adventure*, *Aberrant* and *Trinity*), although similar to our reality in many ways, is nonetheless demonstrably different. While our world had plenty of explorers and adventurers — from Amelia Earhart to Perry and Amundsen and beyond — none of them experienced quite the kind of larger-than-life adventures that your team is sure to undergo. But that doesn't mean you can't use the real world to your advantage. In the broad sweep of things, the worlds are mostly the same (at least until 1998). The Adventure Era is very much like our own early 20th century. There's still a Great Depression, and a Second World War looms on the distant horizon. Real world people, places and events can serve as character inspirations and can add to the excitement of your game.

### Historical Characters

The following individuals made news on the national stage between 1925 and 1928 alone: Chinese nationalist Chiang Kai-shek, Indian activist Mohandas Gandhi, pilot Charles Lindbergh, author Virginia Woolf, expressionist filmmaker Fritz Lang, surrealist Salvador Dali and physicist Erwin Schrödinger. This isn't even a complete list; it's not even an attempt at one! Search the Internet or hit your local library and skim microfiche or digitized newspaper headlines of the day for plenty more.

Characters could easily encounter any one of these individuals or, at least, wade through the aftermath of their activities. Chiang Kai-shek is sure to run afoul of the Ubiquitous Dragon (or perhaps the two are allies...); Ghandi's protests against British Imperial rule in India will certainly reach the attention of heroes visiting that country in search of ancient ruins; Lindy might be a friend or rival to any hero with a bent toward aviation; and so on. Letting players' characters rub elbows with famous historical figures can be lots of fun. It helps ground the characters in the setting and gives the players a much better sense of what is going on around them. And minor changes to the setting's characters as a result of your team's actions are great. *Adventure* isn't a time-travel game; there aren't any Continuity Police wandering around who will get on your case if Lang makes a few changes to *Metropolis* after seeing a character's Thermal Ram in action.

You should handle actual historical figures with some degree of care. You probably don't want some wiseguy wandering to Austria and springing Hitler early. Caution players who obviously want to disrupt the setting by us-

ing out-of-game knowledge that their characters couldn't have. If they persist in playing cutesy historical games with you, have them just be *wrong*. Remember, although similar in many ways, the *Æon Continuum* is *not* our world. Maybe it's *Heisenberg's* cat and the *Schrödinger* uncertainty principle. You should only need to do this once or twice to get the player's attention back on the game rather than the pseudo-historical exercise.

### Magic in Adventure

Strictly speaking, there is no actual "magic" in *Adventure*. There are no ancient places of mystic power, no hoary old tomes filled with spells scrawled by a madman, no nigh-immortal supernatural beings lurking within centuries-sealed tombs. Still, you can easily suggest the influence of telluric radiation as a plausible excuse for ancient mysteries. These energies propagate forward and backward in time, after all. Although Z-waves are a scientific phenomenon (within the setting), that doesn't mean some people of the period don't view it as magic — just look at Mister Saturday or Nefertiti! You could even work out several known points in history that had noteworthy "spikes" of Z-wave energy, when "gods" and heroes emerged or when illuminated conspiracy groups gained vast and unspeakable power.

If you go this route, be careful of overdoing it. If you really want to run a world-with-hidden-magic game, *White Wolf* has several available already. But if you want to insert some of the classic pulp tropes, such as the Cursed Undying Mummy and his ilk, this should provide a plausible means by which to do so.

### Real Places and Historical Events

While a certain amount of flexibility with history must slide into every *Adventure* episode, a Storyteller should be able to wrap her own stories around the places and events of the world at large. This helps the players get a better feeling for the game world in which their characters exist. Real places are easy to research, and they're fun to use. The players and the Storyteller alike can grab a few old maps and guidebooks and note highlights and significant places. With a little advance planning, a team of down-home heroes visiting 1924 Chicago can look over actual headlines from the *Tribune* and photographs of the lakefront and various neighborhoods to get a sense of the place's reality. The Storyteller could even have the names of actual businesses on hand for when the characters want to go shopping or find a res-



taurant. None of this stuff is mandatory, but it makes the experience memorable for everyone.

If the Storyteller prefers not to have "real" history disrupted by player characters' actions, steer the group away from important historical junctures. A team deep in the Congo in October 1929 will naturally have little influence on Wall Street and the Stock Market Crash (though it may well have an impact on *them* when they return to civilization...). It's possible the Storyteller and players don't give a fig about real history. Perhaps, the series will last only a few weeks of game time, or perhaps, no one's worried about the long-term implications of characters' actions. There's not a thing wrong with that attitude. In such a case, use historical events as backdrops or muck them up beyond all recognition as the mood strikes. It's your game; the only thing worth consideration is you and your fellow players' sense of fun.

## Real Research

Since this book has a limited amount of space, we've chosen to focus on writing about those things in **Adventure** that differ from the real world. This book is chock-full of exciting story hooks, but so is our reality. You can find all manner of reference material for your **Adventure** game in a library or on the Internet.

*Example: Grady, one of Adventure's playtest Storytellers, started his series with a story revolving around an exhibit in Chicago's Museum of Natural History. After running "museum," "natural history" and "chicago," through an Internet search engine, he found the homepage of the Field Museum. After telling its librarian that he was working on a story set in 1924, the librarian agreed to fax him contemporary floor plans of the museum. Inspired by his success with the Field Museum, Grady checked with the American Museum of Natural History in New York and got the same friendly assistance! Instant realism, just add water.*

## Inventing Places

Some earlier sections reference places that never were. Storytellers are encouraged to invent more hidden lands. These might be forbidden island monarchies, tribal nations in the heart of Africa or South America, brooding Eastern European principalities and many more beside. A Storyteller probably doesn't want to get downright silly with this — don't drop a 100-kilometer diameter island in the middle of Lake Superior and pretend it's been there all along — but in moderation, it can be fun. Players should feel free to jump in, too. If a character's origin is great but doesn't quite match historical reality, the player might suggest an invented place as the character's homeland. The Storyteller has veto power here, but inventing a new place or modifying a real one may be just as reasonable a solution as asking the player to change the character's history.

## Invaders from Mars!

**Adventure** is set solidly on the surface of Earth, with occasional excursions just below the planet's surface, under the sea and a few thousand feet into the air. Other than creatures altered by the mysterious effects of Hammersmith's experiment, the only sentient inhabitants of the planet are humans. But what about Bug-Eyed Monsters From Another World? Is there no way to work them into the game? There isn't just one way, there are at least two.

First, **Trinity** is set in **Adventure's** future. In **Trinity**, humanity discovers at least four alien races. One is not a technologically adept species, but it would take little tweaking for any of the other three to encounter Earth in the 1920s. A good Storyteller should play up the technological differences between the aliens and humans, while not focusing too much on high-tech gadgetry. It would suffice to know that the aliens travel around in "flying saucers" and shoot "ray guns" and so on.

As a second option, you might say that Z-waves propagated to nearby planets after sweeping over the Earth. Telluric energy seems little affected by physical distance, after all. The barren and infertile deserts of Mars are no less likely to sprout crystalline cities inhabited by little green men than a limestone cavern 200 feet under the Earth's surface is to become the hidden home of the Mole People. And 21st-century scientific knowledge shouldn't get in the way of a rollicking good early 20th-century game.

## Previous Material

The **Æon Continuum** — the shared setting of **Trinity**, **Aberrant** and **Adventure** — has hundreds of thousands of words in print across dozens of sourcebooks, with more on the way. You don't need any of it. The only thing you really need is the book you hold in your hands (and you can even change any of it that you want). Published material is great; it has tons of plot hooks, powers and abilities and setting material that the Storyteller and players may find very useful. Sourcebooks give players and Storytellers a common ground to work from.

But the stuff isn't biblical canon. If a Storyteller reads something in **Adventure** that just doesn't fit with her conception of the game, she should take a minute and figure out what the implications of throwing that thing out will be on other elements of the game. If that doesn't appear to cause further problems, she should feel free to toss it. This goes double for material from **Trinity** and **Aberrant**. Those two games are only *possible* futures for **Adventure**. No Storyteller or player should feel constrained by material found in those two games when it comes to their 1920s adventures.



## Pulp

Many early 21st-century readers may not be as conversant with the conventions and themes of pulp fiction as their counterparts were 75 years ago. Here are a few pointers to assist players and Storytellers in getting into the proper frame of mind. Readers and cinephiles will also want to check out "Inspirations and Resources," page 265.

## What Pulp Is

Pulp adventure fiction served a vital purpose for its time: In the uncertain days from the end of the Great War to the end of the Great Depression, pulp wrote of ordinary people's worries and interests boldly and without the moral ambiguity that was the tone of the day. Sure, there were some morally gray characters, but in the end, it was obvious that the Shadow was on the side of right and justice and Fu Manchu was not. These characters didn't have the ordinary young man's worries about work or school and family; they were playboy adventurers whose wiles no red-blooded woman could resist.

Pulps were often political; the pervasiveness of gangsters, the woman's role in society and America's role in the post-war world were all important elements. Some pulps got preachy (a trait you'll probably want to avoid), but many managed to make a good point about the world around them without being overbearing. Crime in all its forms is an important element also. Most pulp heroes were dedicated to righting wrongs and solving mysteries. Many fought gangsters and rumrunners; at other times, they encountered crime of a less organized nature or super-criminals in the form of characters such as Fu Manchu. Note that "super" doesn't refer to villains with superhuman abilities, but rather criminals without peer, masterminds with world-spanning empires who demanded absolute loyalty from their members.

Air travel is still a relative novelty: Plenty of people in this era believe that someday everyone will have a personal airplane, and piloting is an interesting and novel vocation. Keep a sense of wonder about air travel in your games. Amelia Earhart hasn't disappeared yet, and the *Hindenburg* tragedy doesn't occur for some time. Aerial adventurers and airships are excellent thematic choices.

Lastly, horror and worldwide adventure often went hand-in-hand in pulp stories. Pulp adventurers who found themselves in uncharted parts of the world often faced unspeakable mysteries of savage people. While you don't want your game to resemble the works of H.P. Lovecraft too closely — there are other roleplaying games that do this very well — lending a bit of horror to your team's adventure through strange parts of the world is a useful tactic.

## What Pulp Is Not

### Noir

Noir, as popularized in late-1940s American film and in the works of writers from Raymond Chandler to James Ellroy, is a dark genre. It focuses on the underside

of American society, on desperation and pessimism. Noir fiction shares its roots and era with pulp action adventure, but the two genres are distinct. The primary difference is not one of setting, but of tone. The noir protagonist, often a lone man, is rarely a hero in the classic sense; he is a man of contradiction and moral gray areas.

Protagonists in the pulp-adventure genre aren't necessarily ever-cheerful men of action, but most of them lack the desperate edge that characterizes the noir hero. In addition, pulp characters are more often found in groups. A climactic pulpy battle might involve meaty heroic fists visiting villainous chins; a climactic noir battle might end with a single, regrettable gunshot on a dark waterfront. Pulp action is not a pessimistic place: Characters and stories in *Adventure* look toward a bright horizon, rather than tugging their fedoras down and staring at the sidewalk as it begins to rain.

### Camp

Typically represented by simplistic character development, slapstick and hackneyed dialogue, camp can be seen as the polar opposite of noir. (You could even say that pulp takes the middle road between the two.) Camp grew from the same sources as pulp and noir, and the distinction is likewise a matter of tone rather than setting. Characters in camp are meant to be blatantly over-the-top; they spout cheesy speeches and spend as much time striking poses as they do taking action.

Compared to pulp, camp is pure fluff escapism. No one ever really gets hurt in camp, and heroes and villains are little more than two-dimensional stereotypes. Camp and pulp each allow for — even encourage — extreme efforts. Yet in camp, there's little chance of the character suffering any real lasting harm from a gun battle or falling 15 stories. In pulp, the danger of injury and death is still very real. Both genres encourage larger-than-life action, but pulp does so by remaining rooted in realism.

## Four-Color Superheroics

Although some pulp adventures are chronicled in comic-book format, pulp isn't the same as modern four-color superheroics. The *Æon* Society should never be confused with the X-Men. The difference is partly one of tone, but is mostly a difference in scale. A modern superhero can hoist a battleship without breaking a sweat; a pulp strongman can probably lift the back end of a car over his head with effort. Pulp fistfights end with sore jaws and unconsciousness, some broken furniture and maybe a shattered window. Superheroic battles trash city blocks.

To over-generalize (and risk offending some comic-book fans), superheroes solve problems with clever applications of their powers; pulp heroes solve problems with ingenuity and fortitude.

## Genre and Period Conventions

Below are a few common tropes to pulp-adventure fiction which translate nicely into game material.



## Action

As is mentioned elsewhere, action is rewarded in the pulp-adventure genre. Characters who take firm, decisive action when faced with a crisis should not have the rug yanked out from under them unless their choice of action is colossally stupid — a certain amount of foolhardy stupidity is to be expected and isn't necessarily a bad thing. Players should never doubt that going out and finding trouble is preferable to hanging around and waiting for it to come to them. To that end, players and Storytellers should bear the following things in mind:

Keep ambushes rare and light. Players should never worry that the team will be wiped out at any moment as it searches for the bad guys. Ambushes can and should happen occasionally, but as evidence of a particular scoundrel's wickedness rather than part of every villain's MO. Similarly, players shouldn't resort to ambushes and assassination to accomplish their plans. Certainly stealth has its place, but shooting the enemy in the back isn't very heroic.

The danger shouldn't always come to the heroes. Having a couple of goons with Tommy guns break into the heroes' offices and shoot the place up may keep the plot moving, but it can get overused in a hurry. Players may soon think that the adventure will drop itself in their laps if their characters wait long enough. The game should maintain a certain level of urgency, something that players and Storytellers alike can contribute to. Characters should want to go out and face the world or risk losing the initiative to the criminal element. The pulp genre is about action, not reaction.

Attempt (and reward) zany stunts. If the team decides that the best way into Dr. Nefarious' mountaintop lair is to parachute from an airplane onto the roof, the villain shouldn't have absurdly precise antiaircraft batteries (unless the characters already *know* he has them). The Storyteller can have antiaircraft batteries, but they shouldn't be so accurate as to end the adventure before things really get going. Such details should add danger and risk to a sequence, not to decimate the team. That same idea applies to plenty of scenarios: Unless the characters' plan is indescribably, galactically stupid, the Storyteller should let them take a shot. (If nothing else, there's always dramatic editing....)

## Discrimination

Racism and other kinds of discrimination are very common in the beginning of the previous century. (This is not to say we condone it; it's an unfortunate but nonetheless true circumstance.) The Ku Klux Klan is active and quite popular in the United States. Blacks, foreigners and anyone not a Protestant Christian risks discrimination of some kind. Women have just gotten the vote in the United States, but they're still considered second-class citizens in most of the country and the rest of the world. Hitler's Third Reich is a dark seed growing quickly, and it will cast its shadow over the world in a matter of years.

Remember that heroes in an **Adventure** series are extraordinary people. Social barriers that might hold back others from great accomplishments are still obstacles for such heroes but far from insurmountable ones. A young woman might become a Golden Gloves champ; a black man might graduate at the top of his class from MIT. Players and Storytellers should bear such social obstacles in mind without bringing them up to offensive levels. It's a tricky line to walk, creating conflict without constantly banging the drum of social injustice. A team consisting of a black man and a white woman traveling across the Deep South in 1924 will receive unwanted attention, but risking an in-game lynching is probably not the kind of situation that all players will be comfortable with. The Storyteller can get away with more open xenophobia if the characters travel to strange foreign lands. Where they are the only Westerners to be found, discrimination will be more blatant. Also, such prejudice will be more tolerable to players if it is aimed at the entire team, as opposed to being leveled at just one or two characters.

Everyone playing the game should be willing to tap the social environment of the early 20th century to build tension among the characters, but it should not act as a bludgeon. Any application of discrimination should always be clearly limited to the game. If a player becomes confused as to its focus during a game session, it's time to stop and reassess how things are being handled.

## Science

The super-science rules in Chapter Five can provide a lot of good gaming. Inspired scientists are great plot aids: Their inventions can require strange components that need whole stories to acquire or lead to unexpected consequences after they are finished. The Storyteller should throw the occasional bone to any Inspired scientist characters on the team — mysterious gadgets and unknown technology are their bread and butter, and such players will appreciate the opportunity to exercise their characters' abilities. Players and Storytellers should watch out for overuse of Inspired science, though. Its application can easily overwhelm a game: Players who see an Inspired scientist swiftly solve a problem may decide to redirect their own character paths toward similar activities. Alternately, an adventurer may attempt to use super-science to mimic another character type's Knacks in an attempt to create an über-character.

You probably don't want your team's adventures to revolve primarily around test tubes and mysterious alloys. (*Maybe* you do — a series consisting entirely of the exploits of Inspired scientists could be fun — but it is important to let the players know ahead of time that that's the kind of game you're going to run.) Even Professor Dixon gets out of the lab once in a while. The Storyteller should try to keep ordinary teams' time occupied with action and adventure.

Players should be balanced in designing inventions their characters create. The Storyteller shouldn't be afraid to veto an invention she feels is unreasonable.



A good rule of thumb is that if a new device doesn't give the Storyteller at least as many plot hooks as it gives benefits to the inventor and his allies, it's not a good addition to the series. To assist the Storyteller, the player may want to suggest plot ramifications of his character's new invention.

This rule can also be applied to inventions the bad guys use. The Storyteller may think up an incredible floating dreadnought with a dozen electro-cannons and weather-control antennae, planning to use it as the dramatic final set piece that plummets toward the ground as the team struggles to escape. But the Storyteller should be prepared to face the consequences if the players think up some amazing plan for their characters to save the dreadnought before it's destroyed and the characters start using it as their mobile base.

## The Storyteller

The following section is intended for the Storyteller's use. This doesn't mean that players are forbidden to read it — there aren't any secrets here — but rather that the information herein will be far more useful to Storytellers than to players.

### Plot

Regardless of whether you're putting together a single evening's entertainment or planning a complex, multi-layered epic, it's not going to be much fun if you don't come up with a good plot. Few Storytellers can successfully improvise stories. You will have to make *some* plans for stories you want to run; it is probably best if you start doing so with the first episode of your series. There are nine-and-sixty ways to create stories, to paraphrase Kipling, and every one of them is right.

Let's put aside specific story ideas for now — you'll find story seeds and subplots on page 225 — and discuss general plotting strategies. Below are two strategies that the Storyteller new to **Adventure** may find useful. Feel free to mix and match and to add in your own style.

### Story Plotting

With story-oriented plotting, the Storyteller decides on a series of events that she would like to see take place in a given game session or series of sessions. She might want to run the team through particular set pieces or might choose to generate certain challenges that are particularly well suited to certain characters on the team. This method of plotting should be familiar, since it's how we experience most motion pictures and books. The characters move from scene to scene, learning facts about the events surrounding them and about themselves, and take action as they see fit. The upside to this sort of episode creation is that it allows for elaborate "set pieces" — that is to say, complex scenes with a lot of things going on — and that it gives the Storyteller more control over the events in her game.

The downside to heavily story-oriented plotting is that players may feel bound by the storyline that their Storyteller has created. If you place the secret turbo-rocket in the villain's lair and are dead set on a scene in which Our Heroes must fight through 25 axe-wielding robot Viking warriors to reach it, there isn't much room for the team to find another way in or to plan a way around the confrontation.

### Backstory Plotting

In contrast to story-based plotting, a Storyteller might choose to avoid issues of scene planning entirely. Instead, she works out a timeline of events and plans her Storyteller characters' probable reactions to various team actions. If the team chooses to sit on its duff and not take action, the timeline the Storyteller generated will go off without a hitch. No plan of this sort survives contact with players, but it gives a good general outline and plenty of room to improvise.

In backstory plotting, characters' actions really can make a difference; this is the strongest argument in favor of this kind of episode planning. The downside here is the planning itself — not only working out a feasible plan but also being able to rework it on the fly. As Storyteller, you've got to think hard about the ways that players can poke at the scheme you've created, and you must be ready to improvise scenes anyplace along the way. And worse, players might miss a clue or fail to realize that anything is going on at all if they are led off track early in the episode.

### Combining the Two

Since each of the two above approaches has weaknesses, the best solution might be to throw together a little of each. Plot out a general storyline that your team will experience, but work out in the background what sorts of events are going on to produce the visible plot. This way, although you have a general plan laid out, you have something to reach for when the players do something utterly unexpected... and they *always* do something unexpected.

### Event Paths

Start with a basic plan, then decide what sequence of events would occur if the team spent the entire episode doing something else? If possible, write these up as a series of simple declarative statements:

- *The Pharaoh's hired goons rob Presley's Jewelry Store and take their goods to the Simmons Warehouse on River Street...*
- *The Pharaoh's hired goons break into the Museum of Ancient History and make off with the Queens of Egypt Exhibit, taking their goods to the Simmons Warehouse on River Street...*
- *A riverboat arrives at the docks on River Street and the goons load their stolen wares onto it under the watchful eye of the Pharaoh's lieutenant, the Red Razor...*

...and so on.



For each of the simple statements you've just written out, now present simple questions and answers: What happens if our heroes interrupt the goons? Will they fight to the death or run away? If the goons are defeated, what information can they reveal to the team? If one escapes and brings word to his villainous master, how will subsequent plans change? What happens if the thugs actually manage to defeat the heroes?

The answers to some of these questions will probably inspire new events to be added to the initial list — it may now include things such as *"The goons dump the heroes' unconscious bodies into the river"* and *"The Red Razor sends out a few of his snitches to gather some dirt on the team."* At this stage, start connecting these events; you may find that more than one starting event leads to a later event. That's okay; it actually simplifies your planning, as you only have to work out the details for *"The Red Razor sends out a few of his snitches to gather some dirt on the team"* one time, even if it can be triggered from several events.

You may find it useful to draw a box around each event and arrange them all chronologically (events that must precede others go on the left and later consequences go on the right — or whatever scheme you prefer). You can then draw arrows from one event to its consequence. In short order you'll probably have something of a diamond-shaped plan worked out, with few events on the left-hand side (the introduction to the episode), a bunch of possibilities around the middle, and fewer and fewer possible results as you progress toward the end of the episode (and the heroes figure out what's going on), with one or a few possible final resolutions forming the rightmost point on the diamond.

## Flexibility

Players don't know what you have in store for them. You should use this to your advantage whenever possible. Players don't know that their characters have to go down to the five-and-dime and bump into old Professor Bradley to hear him espouse about the dangers of the new cobalt rifles the Army is testing out in the desert. When they go to the movies instead, you can't get annoyed with them for not knowing where to get the next clue. You have to think on your feet.

Maybe they run into Professor Bradley while walking home from the movies — perhaps he is walking his dog and is annoyed at having to do so this late in the evening (something you could use as a roleplaying hook). But you don't have to use Prof. Bradley to impart the information the team needs. A character with contacts in the service might run into an old Army friend who had to get into town to get the general's car fixed (who mentions problems with the cobalt rifles). A keen-eyed flier might notice a lot of dust and activity on the horizon, toward the Army's testing grounds. Or — perhaps the best option of all — you might drop subtler clues that

something's afoot outside of town and pull the characters into a full-blown investigation of a fact you had previously planned to just drop in their laps. The possibilities are endless.

As a Storyteller, your job is to remember the information that the team needs to get and hurl it into the characters' path when it seems appropriate to do so. The means may have to change to fit the group's actions, and it is your job to make that change seem natural and planned.

The same principle holds true for action sequences. Say you have a positively brilliant set piece worked out on the streets of Mexico City. The characters, having acquired the Skull of Quetzal, have to reach the airfield before their flight back to the States leaves, and you know that the fanatical minions of Colonel Santiago will do anything to stop them. So you've worked out a frenzied rush through the streets, an ambush in the main marketplace, explosions, maniacs jumping from rooftops onto the group's truck and so on.

And then the players slyly put the Skull in a burlap sack and sneak to the airfield dressed as beggars!

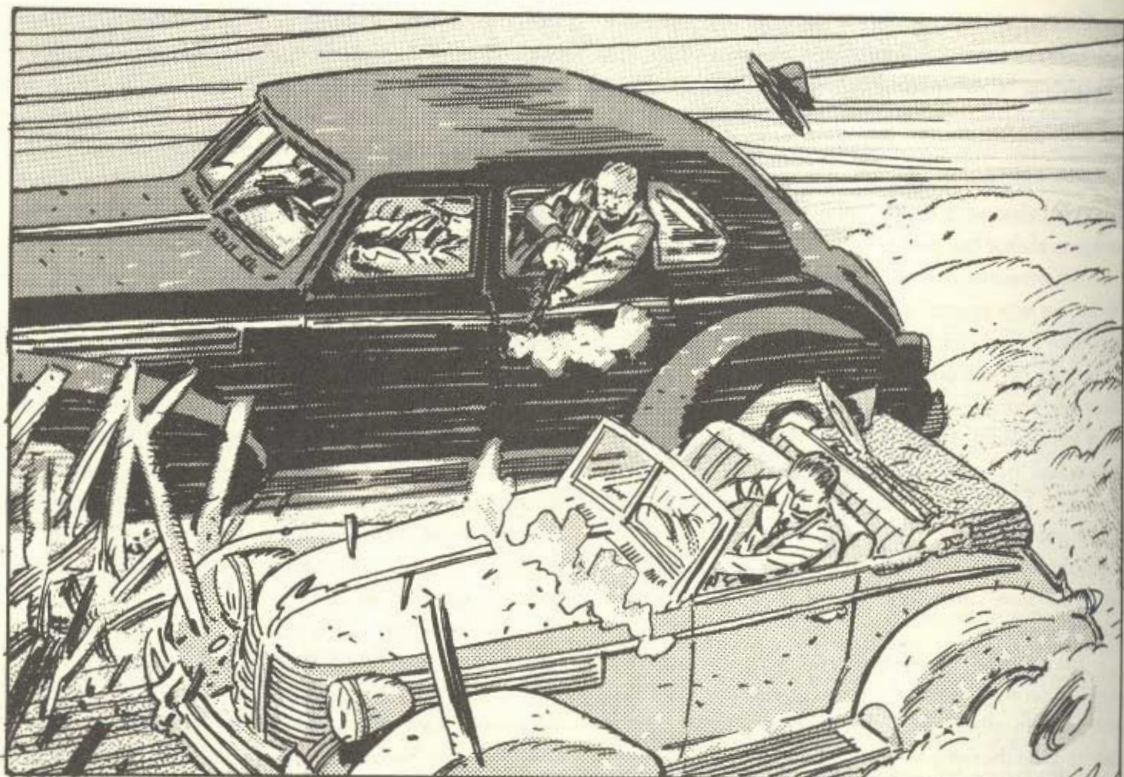
First, calmly take your notes regarding Colonel Santiago's clever ambushes and the frenzied chase out of town and put them aside. No amount of subtle hinting on your part will get those characters onto the truck their in-country allies provided. But don't let the players know that they've sidestepped your scheme. The ambush and wild chase will work just as well in Cairo against the Pharaoh's men, three sessions from now, as it would have today.

This is a time for improvisation. Colonel Santiago's men will hunt around town in small groups, looking for Americans who match the team's description, and now, a tense but subtle series of exchanges takes place as the characters avoid capture while still making their best possible time to the airfield. It's a different kind of tension than they would have faced in the zany truck-chase scene, but it's no less interesting — and no less valid. The worst possible thing you could do would be to try and force the group back into the path you created for them. Responding to the players' choices in this way not only keeps the tension level high, it keeps the players equal partners in the roleplaying experience.

## Hurling Action at Characters

Raymond Chandler, author of such works as *The Big Sleep*, is reported to have said that whenever he got stuck for what direction to take a plot, he had a couple of men burst through the nearest door and start shooting. This is a fine suggestion for **Adventure** Storytellers. If your players seem bound and determined to argue boring points rather than going out and taking decisive action against the bad guys, don't be afraid to bring the action to them. It doesn't literally have to be goons with guns coming through the door; maybe the kidnaped lounge singer comes stumbling into their secret hideaway, or two rival gangs start a brawl in the bar downstairs from El Mono Loco's apartment.





If you use this suggestion, you'll need a plan. Unlike Chandler, who had plenty of time to figure out where the random element came from after writing the fight scene, as a Storyteller you'll have about ten seconds from "...and the final thug goes down with a good karate kick from El Mono Loco" to "Where did these guys come from? How did they find us? Do they have any clues in their jackets?"

When you plan out an episode, it never hurts to take six or nine lines of notes and scrawl out the answers to "Where did they come from?" "How did they find us?" and "What clues do they bear?" for two or three groups of thugs. If you don't need them, little time has been wasted, and you might be able to use them in a future session. But if you *do* need them, you can refer to your notes and minimize the time spent on comments like "Uhhh, they must work for the, uh, Magelli Gang, and, uhh, hang on...."

## Publicity and the Weird Stuff

Heroic activity in the world of **Adventure** does not always come with the harsh spotlight of media attention. Oh, heroes may attract the press if their regular exploits take place in the public eye, but the general public doesn't necessarily believe the zany sorts of things that pulp action heroes experience. Newspapers are liable to try anything to boost readership, thinks John Q. Public, and stories about mysterious vigilantes or giant apes might well be just a ploy to get more readers.

Thus, the world at large is skeptical of wild claims made by heroes. Unless a person is a witness to seemingly impossible events or actually runs into The Dark

Avenger in an alleyway, that person will probably just dismiss such crazy stories. This works to heroes' advantage, most of the time.

## Breaking the Rules

Remember the Golden Rule. If you think a particular Knack should change or that difficulty numbers for all tasks should be 6, or 8, then so be it. The rules should always come second to having fun. With that said, there are a few caveats:

- Don't radically change the rules during a game session (unless the characters enter a hidden land where reality really does work differently).
- Don't break the rules specifically to advantage or disadvantage a given character: Be consistent. If Rapport gives a Storyteller character a chance to detect that a character is the victim of hypnosis, it should work that way for players' characters.
- Don't get into arguments with players over rules.

If you make a snap judgment in the middle of a game session and you're not sure of that ruling's future implications, say: "I'm making this judgment now, but I may change my mind when I consider it after the game. If I do, I will let you know what the new ruling is. For the time being, let's get back to the game."

## You Get What You Encourage

The Storyteller's reactions to the characters' actions encourage and discourage certain behaviors among the players. This subtle point is often lost on novice Storytellers, and it can cause so much frustration that the novice quits storytelling altogether.



Let's take as an example Keisha, a novice Storyteller. Her friends Olaf, Hamed and Xue get together for the game's first session one Sunday afternoon. Keisha explains she wants the game to be larger-than-life, cinematic adventure. The players create characters that they think will be appropriate: Hamed creates a daredevil martial artist, Olaf a dangerously curious scientific prodigy, and Xue a mysterious, two-fisted righter of wrongs. Keisha starts all three characters off at a high-class restaurant, with a 10-piece band playing softly, while a beautiful young diva croons.

When the action begins and the mobsters try to take the diva hostage, Xue's character dives into a melee with several gangsters. Olaf's character tries to surreptitiously pocket the mysterious device that one of the Mafiosi left on his tabletop, while Hamed's character grabs for a hanging lamp to swing to the stage and help the captured singer.

Say the gangsters mow Xue's character down with Tommy guns, the mysterious device is booby-trapped and the hanging lamp's cord is too weak to hold Hamed's character. Should all the characters survive, Xue's two-fisted brawler may start carrying a gun and spend more time behind cover. Olaf's scientist will carry prongs and measuring devices wherever he goes, and Hamed's daredevil will get a lot more cautious. These things dilute the characters' natures. Far more importantly, they go against what Keisha told the group she wanted the game to be about.

If, as a Storyteller, you want your Storyteller characters to react "sensibly" (shooting the brawler) and you want your physics to be suitably real world (the lamp's cord breaks), you need to make certain your players are aware of such things before play begins. This is rarely an issue of deliberate deception; it just turns out that some Storytellers' plans don't match their own storytelling technique. If you feel your team is overly cautious, ask yourself why they're being that way. Did the last one to try a classic, foolish, cinematic stunt have his legs kicked out from under him? Do villains shoot hostages when characters try to bluff or feint them into releasing them? If it seems you're being too restrictive, try letting the zany stuff work! That's part of the interest of the pulp-adventure genre. It's life-threateningly ridiculous for Doc Savage to descend by hand on a steel line strung down the side of a skyscraper, but it's so much cooler than taking the elevator. Likewise, your players are more likely to retell the time they parachuted out of the exploding airplane while fighting off the Sky Chimpanzees of Borneo as they descended, than they are the time the plane blew up and they all died because they couldn't get their parachutes on in time.

This can happen more subtly, too. If you gloss over romance plots and scientific exploration and spend three-quarters of every game session on combat and heroics derring-do, many players will make sure their characters can do *something* in combat, often changing a character's basic concept in order to better fit the game as-run. This

is not necessarily desirable: Again, if you want a combat-heavy game, tell the players up front. If you claim you're going to run one thing and find yourself running another, you need to change direction or come clean about the way it's headed. You may wish to give the players a chance to change the characters they're running or discuss the series in general and see if they're having fun.

A good Storyteller can use this sort of thing to her advantage by selectively steering her attention across the gaming table. Perhaps the combat-oriented character's player wants to monopolize your attention with a discussion of all the guns and bullets his character intends to purchase. At the same time, the scientist's player — perhaps the quiet type or one who doesn't know quite what he'd be doing in-character with the new gizmo he's discovered — sits silently and only asks a few questions. But you would rather focus on the gadgetry and gee-whiz than on a mundane trip down to the gun shop. Responding to the combat character's request with a polite but quick "Okay, sure, you can pick up the stuff you need, no problem," then moving into the scientist character's investigation in loving detail lets everybody know what parts of the game will be the series' focus. In turn, they will likely steer their own characters' interests toward that focus.

Be careful in these situations and avoid rudeness. It is simply bad storytelling to respond to the combat character's questions with "Yeah, Hamed, whatever, get what you want, I don't give a damn about that twinkly crap." And if you make it seem like you are only interested in one character's activities, the other players will quickly grow discouraged with the game.

## Conclusions

Every good episode has a good ending. The whole session should be fun, but the end is the part the players carry with them when they walk away from the gaming table for the night, and it forms the seed of their attitude about the session. So, you'll want to knock their socks off with the episode's climax and resolution and, then, have a pleasant and useful denouement to wrap things up and set the stage for the next episode.

Awarding experience points is only a small part of what the Storyteller does at the conclusion of a game session. Have you completed just tonight's episode or an entire story? A story should end tidily, with most of its loose ends and subplots tied neatly in a bow, while an episode can end with plenty of matters unresolved. It's a good idea to sit down right after an episode and take notes as to where the story stands: where the major characters are, what various characters know about secrets and ongoing plots, what followers have been assigned to any tasks, and so on. By contrast, at the end of an entire story, it's probably only necessary to note any villainous Storyteller characters who escaped justice and whether there was any press coverage of the characters' exploits.



## The Series

**Adventure** is designed to allow for stories you can play through in a single session as well as plots that unfold over a long series of episodes.

### The One-Shot

A one-shot story is meant to be completed in a single session (four hours or so). The amount of story that you can cram into such a short period depends on a lot of variables — are you playing face to face or over the Internet, are your players prone to a lot of digressions, do you roleplay most encounters out or only the important ones and so on — but the simple answer is: not a lot.

Most Storytellers run one-shots to provide a change of pace from another game or to expose new players to **Adventure**; in either case, you will probably want to have a straightforward plot. You probably won't be able to manage more than a few encounters or explore any deep subplots. Instead, concentrate on the unique parts of **Adventure**'s setting. Pick an interesting villain or villainous group, or select a dangerous far-off locale in which to run a scenario. Try and work in opportunities for every team member to contribute uniquely, and allow for some dramatic editing (see p. 193).

### The Ongoing Series

In an ongoing series, you can be more leisurely about introducing elements than you would be in a one-shot. You don't need to start a series with some kind of master plan for the next year's worth of games. It shouldn't be too hard to spend a fair amount of time running mostly unconnected stories with a bit of downtime between them. Eventually, you may find yourself leaning backward into other stories you've run, snaking up Storyteller characters and red herrings or offhand references and folding them into stories of their own. The series may eventually even take on a life of its own, as the characters become well developed enough that they initiate their own plotlines.

Unlike a one-shot, an ongoing series gives you more leisure to focus on individual characters and their associated Storyteller characters. You may run one story to specifically explore El Mono Loco's relationship with his half-brother and arch-nemesis Dr. Macaque, the next to introduce a new group of villains and later work on another character's enemy. That doesn't mean that any given story should always be about just one character: Try to arrange for everyone to have something to do in any story you run. But it's okay to focus one storyline on one character and probably a lot of fun for that player when you do so.

For more discussion of subplots in ongoing series, see "Subplots," p. 226.

### Long-Running Series

You may wish to run an extremely long-term series. A series that starts in 1924 and extends into the Second World

War may prove enjoyable for your players, as they can duplicate the wartime feats of many pulp and comic-book heroes. After the war, surviving Inspired heroes mostly go underground; they don't hide from the world, but they lead more mundane lives. Cheesy Technicolor adventures in the 1960s and '70s could be a lot of fun to run, but it isn't until the Nova Age, begun when Divis Mal (AKA Dr. Primoris) engineers a quantum trigger event in 1978, that super-powered beings return to the world stage. The characters are liable to be movers and shakers in this era; they might help guide society through the golden age of novae and fight in the Aberrant War. They may help society rebuild after the war or escape to the stars; this phase of the series is filled with opportunity and the chance to reshape society. Finally, in the Trinity Era, the characters can become part of humanity's expansion into the universe at large, meeting alien races or defending the world against hostile aberrants.

## Theme

**Adventure** completes the *Æon Continuum*'s three thematic aspects: **Trinity** is Unity; **Aberrant** is Sacrifice; and **Adventure** is Hope. Certainly, the 1920s and '30s are uncertain decades, and no one knows what the future will bring, but in the bright days dawning after the Great War, anything seems possible. The Hammersmith incident grants rare individuals the ability to genuinely reshape the world.

Hope can take on many forms, but in general, **Adventure** looks forward with an eye on making the future as good as it can be. Scientists make new discoveries every day, and advanced technology such as high-powered radio transmitters and transcontinental telegraphy are dreams no longer. Advances in life sciences are no less dramatic (and with the advent of penicillin in 1928, many believe that the eradication of disease as we know it is right around the corner). The secrets of radioactivity and the atom itself might soon make themselves known, ushering in an era of universal wealth and prosperity.

This perspective is a tricky thing to cultivate in a roleplaying game. Storyteller and players all know that the optimism of this era will lead to the Great Depression and the Second World War (and, in the *Æon Continuum*, eventually to the Aberrant War and Exodus). The characters do not know that, though, and it is important that they operate in ignorance of the future, playing the booming stock market for all they're worth and having a gay old time.

## Mood

Perhaps "rollicking" is too strong a word to describe **Adventure**'s mood, but it gets across certain ideas in a hurry. The game is meant to be action oriented and optimistic: Heroes discover some villain's fiendish plot and defeat the villain. This doesn't necessarily lead to a simplistic game: Characters in **Adventure** are just as complex as they would be in any other genre. Plots and Storyteller character motivations should be similarly complex and deep. But in the balance, the team doesn't live in



a haunted nightmare world, nor in a dark parody of modern media over-saturation: They live in a brightly colored reflection of a simpler day. Absent should be the story in which the characters discover a world-girdling conspiracy that they simply cannot defeat or displace. Concentrate instead on menaces that the heroes can take worthwhile action against, once they are alerted to the menace's presence. Victory is never assured, but with strong arms and stout hearts, the heroes have every chance of carrying the day.

## Story Seeds

Below are a few ideas that can work as described or that you can use as inspiration for your own plots. They can be used for a single episode story or as the starting points for an ongoing series.

### Foiling the Villain's Plot

In this hoary old standby, the team learns of a terrible plot for world domination instigated by an appropriately melodramatic villain. It might start simply — the heroes prevent some goons from knocking over a jewelry store. They then follow clues that indicate that something bigger is going on and, after a number of confrontations, discover that a mastermind arch-villain is plotting to rule (or destroy or blackmail, etc.) the world. The team must find and enter the villain's secret hideaway, disrupt his wicked scheme and bring him to justice by whichever means they find most appropriate.

### Exploring the Lost World

The characters learn that an old friend has disappeared and go to his rescue; perhaps he was a scientist in darkest Africa or was shipwrecked in the Indian Ocean. As they arrive to the site of the disappearance, they find themselves on the border of a hidden land, a place that has been... changed... by the zero-point energy wave that swept over the world. Within the hidden land, the team must face terrible environmental dangers, strange monsters and foreign cultures.

### Defend Yourself!

A conspiracy of some sort takes action against one member of the team (or perhaps the team in its entirety). It starts subtly — newspaper articles pop up that shed light on incidents that the team would prefer to keep in the dark, for instance. Then the newspapers find proof that the heroes did things that *they* know they didn't do. Then the police begin to come after the team, and then some previously unknown person or group — a new district attorney, an Inspired crime fighter, a vigilante group — does so, saving the city from the menace that the players' characters pose. Of course the previously unknown antagonists are the true villains of the tale: they have set the heroes up to take a fall in order to bolster their own reputation. Perhaps they have an old grudge to settle and no longer look like the group the heroes wronged a few years ago. The

heroes must defeat this foe and, somehow, rescue their own reputations in doing so.

### The Mysterious Stranger

A new person has entered the characters' usual home territory. Perhaps he is a foreigner, or perhaps he is just a previously unknown Inspired character from the local area. Regardless, the characters know precious little about this individual and his goals. The team may attempt to befriend the stranger or treat him as a hostile interloper.

The characters' goals and activities intersect at right angles with those of the mysterious stranger. They do not come into direct conflict, but the team must reach some sort of détente with the stranger before they can solve the problem posed by the real villain of the story. Perhaps that villain is the mysterious stranger, or perhaps the villain is merely manipulating the heroes and the stranger into fighting to satisfy his own nefarious ends.

### Enemies of the State

Criminals or anarchists have begun a reign of terror in the heroes' home city. Perhaps a war has broken out between rival Mob factions, or anarchists are lashing out against the forces of law and order. The team is caught in the middle and must either help the proper authorities restore order or attempt to bring about peace on their own. Morally ambiguous heroes might take advantage of the chaos to strike a blow against a known villain who has previously been protected by the police, but such a villain is likely to have his personal security forces out in spades to assist in this time of crisis.

Similar effects to this kind of episode seed can be generated in the aftermath of an earthquake, tornado or hurricane; the authorities are too busy with cleanup to stop certain elements from engaging in criminal activity. The heroes must step in and keep things safe for the ordinary people.

### Personal Stories

A personal story most often springs from a well-developed subplot (see below). In these stories, a character's own motivations (or neuroses) push him to accomplish some task. Perhaps it's something melodramatic, such as finally confronting the murderer of the hero's parents, or maybe it's more mundane and long-range, such as the hero deciding to establish his own shipping company in the South China Sea. From a Storyteller's standpoint, the great thing is that you don't have to do nearly as much work. The character's motivation is right there; he's the one who gets the episode moving for you. You just need to set up a few challenges and decide what complications will befall his plans.

The downside of these stories is that, by their very nature, they are almost impossible to make happen as a Storyteller. Eventually, a player will tell you that his character has a task he wishes to accomplish, and then, off you'll go. Until that time, sit tight and keep seeding the subplots into the week-to-week stories.



## Subplots

Whether it's a one-shot **Adventure** episode or an extended series, players appreciate feeling that their characters are a part of the world you describe. Character histories and background descriptions certainly help to ground characters in the setting, but nothing grabs your players' attention like a personalized subplot. You can also use subplots to highlight particular themes and moods or to provide additional information of just about any kind.

When you start a series, you should have a relatively good idea of who the characters are, their respective histories and why they adventure together. With all this information, you should be able to generate a simple plotline that applies to each character. These snippets don't have to be complicated, and they should be the kinds of things that can lay in the background for a while.

Say the team of adventurers consists of: Ace Borgstrom, devil-may-care dilettante and sometime pilot; El Mono Loco, martial artist from the jungles of Paraguay; Dr. Tenzing Smith, half-Sherpa archaeologist; and Rachel "Lady Lead" Buongiorno, the first female Golden Gloves champion of New York City. Your primary storyline revolves around the events leading up to the Elder Statesman's attempt to hold the 1924 Democratic National Convention hostage, with a big climax planned on the convention floor.

You might work up the following subplots: The boys down at Ace's preferred airfield have been acting a little strange lately (the Mob is pressuring them to let some surreptitious rumrunning traffic in and out). Dr. Smith's contact at the museum has an Egyptian artifact he thinks Smith would like to look at (it's the property of an Egyptian landowner, of course). El Mono Loco's apartment building burns down in a suspicious fire (his corrupt landlord needed the insurance money). Lastly, a brash young male boxer calling himself Kid Midas arrives in the big city and is overheard publicly scoffing at the idea that Lady Lead could possibly beat a *real* fighter such as himself.

Subplots are fairly straightforward to use once introduced into your series, but that introduction can be very hard to pull off. You'd like to hook the character's interest, but you don't want the entire team investigating El Mono Loco's apartment fire when the Statesman's goons are up to no good elsewhere. A good technique is to run the primary plotline for at least a full session at the start of a series and introduce one or two subplots during downtimes in the second or later sessions. In that fashion, players will understand the real focus of their characters' activities, while still getting interesting things to do individually.

Also, don't go overboard subplotting. Each character should get a subplot during the series, but you shouldn't introduce them all at once, and you shouldn't feel pressure to resolve them in a big hurry, either. In one session, Ace Borgstrom might learn that the guys at the

airfield are acting a little strangely, but that's all. Perhaps he can't sway them into telling him what's up at first; it might take until next session before he notices darkened planes taking off and landing late at night. It could be four or five sessions before Ace learns what's really going on, and by that time, you might want to turn this subplot into a full-blown episode of its own.

If you hurl out too many subplots at once, the players will get confused, and you will probably get lost. It is as important to take notes about your subplots as it is with your main storylines. Generally, a novice Storyteller can introduce one new subplot per session and advance a few existing subplots by small steps each session. After you get more familiar with doing this, you might be comfortable with games that are whirling nightmares of plot and counterplot. Just remember that if your players start to mutter to one another that there's too much going on for them to keep track of, you're probably overdoing it and should scale things back.

## Types of Subplots

There are more types of subplots than can easily be listed here, but hopefully, the following list will serve to spur your imagination and provide you with some entertaining stories for your players.

- **Romance:** This subplot is a classic, familiar from movies, books, comics and TV. A player might initiate it, perhaps your description or portrayal of a particular character catches his attention. You might initiate the plot instead, suggesting that a Storyteller character asks a player's character out on a date. This is considerably easier when the player's character is female, given the circumstances of **Adventure**'s setting, but the world is changing quickly enough that it wouldn't be shockingly inappropriate for a female Storyteller character to pursue a male team member. Romances provide a personal motivation for players' characters; it is one thing for the Pharaoh to kidnap the handsome yet shy Dr. DeWitt and another altogether if Dr. DeWitt is Lady Lead's fiancé.

Many groups have problems integrating romantic subplots — players may be uncomfortable exhibiting in-character affection toward Storyteller characters in the person of the Storyteller; the Storyteller may introduce romantic subplots ham-handedly; out-of-character relationships may make the whole situation more stress than it's worth. To help alleviate these sorts of problems, talk to the affected player(s) before you work a romantic subplot into your game. Things are more enjoyable for all concerned if the player whose character is romantically involved is interested in furthering the subplot.

- **Mystery:** A good Storyteller can make a mysterious subplot out of just about any event. Mysteries do not necessarily have to be violent, whodunit affairs, either. The question of why the character's parents are acting particularly coldly toward one another might be answered by "Dad forgot their wedding anniversary," but



the character is sure to pursue the mystery avidly until the solution is found. Mystery subplots are probably the easiest to generate; all you have to do as a Storyteller is figure out what's going on, how the character catches wind of the event and what levels of secrecy lie between the character and the truth. Then simply allow the subplot to unfold as the character pursues it.

• **Rivalry:** This subplot can involve the character's heroic life (another Inspired scientist starts showing up Dr. Tenzing Smith's discoveries) or his mundane life (another woman becomes romantically interested in Lady Lead's fiancé). In either event, a person who is not necessarily the character's enemy competes with the character in some way. The character might respond violently (and such a response may or may not be warranted), or he might redouble his efforts in the part of his life that the rival competes with him in. A good rivalry can go on for a long time in an extended series, with characters endlessly trying to one up the other; rivals might eventually become staunch allies or shift from mere rivals into outright enemies.

• **Tragedy:** In a tragedy subplot, something terrible happens (or threatens to happen) to the character or a loved one. His parents might be evicted from the family farm, or he might learn that he has contracted a case of Armstrong's Syndrome, which is nearly always fatal. Players rarely take kindly to having abuse gratuitously heaped on their characters. Unless you are leading up to a longer term storyline, it is probably better to have tragic subplots be reversible — the parents' farm can be bought back from the bank, or the only cure for Armstrong's Syndrome is held by the shadowy Dr. Emil Wendt, who has recently disappeared....

• **Personal Ventures:** This is a catch-all category describing work or hobbies the character engages in when not actively saving the world. Perhaps the reformed gangster takes a night on the town with the boys from the old neighborhood; the action hero with a great singing voice pulls down a few bucks doing torch songs at a jazz club; the gadgeteering scientist tinkers with experimental gizmos in his lab on campus; and so on. These subplots don't usually haul the sort of emotional baggage that others do, but that won't make them any less enjoyable for the player involved. Personal venture subplots can help ground a character in his setting and give a player a better feel for his character's contacts and allies.

## Getting Back on Track

Every experienced Storyteller has seen a game session stall in place. It can happen for plenty of reasons. Maybe you created a mystery that is just too intricate for your players to have their characters solve on a Friday night after a long work week. Perhaps your Storyteller characters are too thinly portrayed and you aren't doing a good job of getting the team interested in them — or worse, perhaps the Storyteller characters are

dominating the game and leaving the players twiddling their thumbs. Below are some sample problems that may occur along with suggested solutions.

• **My players act bored!** Ask them why! Don't be defensive about it; at a suitable breaking point or at the end of a game session, just say, "I want to make sure you folks are enjoying the game; got anything you'd like to see me throw in?" Admittedly, your friends aren't likely to tell you if you're just a terrible Storyteller (although we're sure that's not the case). If there are concrete problems — "I was expecting a lot of gunplay and zaniness, but this is a tense murder mystery, and that's not what I was interested in" — you know how to adjust the game. You may not be able to fix things all at once, but you can at least add elements that will be appreciated.

• **A player isn't into the game!** You might get a player who just isn't there for the game. One might be there because her boyfriend plays and this is her best chance to see him. Another might be a roommate who can't watch TV while the group games in the living room. In any case, such players are not really interested in the game, and they can easily distract from the episode at hand.

You can handle this problem in a couple of ways, starting with talking to the involved party privately. On one hand, you could co-opt him; talk about what he would enjoy in a game, and see if you can accommodate him. Toss a simple, engaging subplot his way. If you're lucky, within a few sessions, the nonparticipant will be an avid part of your series, and you'll forget he was ever a problem. Alternatively, suggest that the person who isn't really there to play may not want to attend the sessions. If the nonparticipant is there to spend time with a significant other, you risk losing both. That's something they need to work out, though; it's not your business how they handle their relationship. No one should be forced to play if they don't want to, though. If that means you lose a couple of players or have to relocate your game as a result, it's probably all for the best.

• **They're not solving the mystery!** Sometimes, a mystery that seems facile and obvious to its creator is thoroughly befuddling to a group of players. Often, depressingly, this is the Storyteller's fault. Characters do miss clues, but more often, a crucial piece of information just never reaches from inside the Storyteller's brain to the players' collective understanding. It is difficult to solve this problem without being heavy handed ("A man keels over, clutching a note that says 'check the basement.'").

You can work around this problem in one of two ways. Firstly, try casually leading the players to the information or connection they're not seeing. Don't be clumsy; think a few steps away from the missing information, then plant subtle hints that lie between it and the team's current knowledge. If a major clue can be found in a bakery that the team visited once but didn't investigate closely enough, remind Dr. Smith that he promised his sister to bring the birthday





cake for her son's birthday party tomorrow, but he won't have time to bake it himself.

Secondly, look over your notes and figure out what the antagonists would be up to now that the heroes can't solve the mystery in question. See if you can work out a way for the goons' activities to cross the heroes' path a second time. Again, don't be too clumsy about this. Don't just toss the bad guys at the players' characters; give them a logical reason to run across the team and a logical reaction when the confrontation takes place.

- **They want to roleplay everything!** "...and then I wander down to Macy's; what's in the storefront window?" There's roleplaying, and then there's chewing the scenery. There's nothing wrong with allowing the players to jaw back and forth in character — to a point. Getting sidetracked by minutiae can overshadow the game to the point where the characters never get anywhere or do anything. Players may want to occupy your attention as Storyteller with trivial stuff. This problem can be hard to diagnose, though, as it seems like the players are having fun, and isn't that the point of getting together every week or few to play?

Look, the game is called **Adventure** for a reason. There are plenty of roleplaying games out there well suited to subtle roleplay and extended in-character debate and conversation. This is not one of them! As suggested elsewhere, if the players insist on roleplaying trips to the grocery store, have the Pharaoh's men blow the place up. If characters (and players) get too complacent

with a lack of action, you will have to force it onto them until they realize that they must go confront it.

- **The players are seriously off-track!** They grabbed one of your red herrings, conflated it with a clue leading to the *real* adventure and an offhand comment by an unconnected Storyteller character and are now chasing faulty information into the Kalahari. Worse, they assume every Storyteller character who tries to guide the heroes back to the real plotline must be part of the conspiracy!

Short of stepping out of game and saying, "Folks, you are chasing a red herring here, and I can't figure out how to make you stop," you can do one of three things. You can grab your main episode and wrench it around to fit some of the characters' expectations (which is tricky, but doable). You can dead-end literally every investigation the characters make regarding the red herring — perhaps there are no clues available, or they all lead to perfectly mundane resolutions. Or you can go with the flow to accommodate the players' pursuit of the red herring, wrap it up satisfactorily for them (and quickly for you) and drop new leads to bring them back to the storyline you spent so much time and effort on to begin with. With a little ingenuity, you can make everyone happy.

## The Opposition

It's time to talk about the blokes in black, twirling their sinister mustaches and plotting world domination. The pulp villain — from the demented tribal shaman to the criminal mastermind — is a crucial part of any **Ad-**



venture series. In many ways, without a villain there would be no story at all. He (or she — women can be just as wicked as men) is the hub around which all things rotten in a given episode must revolve. The next chapter includes descriptions of villains already influencing the Adventure Era. Feel free to add your own fiends to your stories. This section contains tips on creating and properly using villains... and on keeping them alive to cackle maniacally another day.

## Creating a Villain

Planning your episode or series does not have to begin with the villain (or villains), but you will have to consider the team's antagonists before you get too far. It may be easiest to ask three simple questions about your villain at this point: What does he want? What does he have to help him get it? And how will he go about getting it?

## Motivation

Many classic pulp villains have suitably wicked motivations: They want to rule the world, destroy the world, become fantastically rich or avenge themselves on Our Hero and his works. These motivations work very well for villains in **Adventure**: It's one of the tropes of the genre that some people are just unrepentantly bad guys. (Still, this doesn't mean that's all they are. Just because a character has a clear motivation doesn't make him a two-dimensional caricature.)

The 1920s and '30s also had plenty of mundane villains to choose from: mobsters, nihilists, fascists, anarchists and radicals. Many crusaders for the public good, some of whom were very popular, would have added blacks, Jews, Catholics, communists, atheists and foreigners of all stripes to that list. To slap such a label on a Storyteller character and assume that that alone makes him a villain is almost never sufficient — few, if any, members of those groups were villainous in the really wicked pulp-villain sense.

The villain's means — his plans (see below) — must be the sorts of thing to bring him into conflict with right-minded adventurers. But his motivations don't necessarily have to be. Many villains crusade for what they see as a greater good — elevating all humanity, reclaiming a lost homeland or "redistributing" the money of the wealthy. Villains with believable motivations of this kind are great to throw into an **Adventure** series because their actions come from a reasonable root cause. Most of these types genuinely do feel that the end justifies the means and are guilty primarily of lacking a sense of proportion. That doesn't excuse their crimes; in the end, the best they deserve is a sock in the jaw and a drag to the nearest police station.

## Resources

Villains' resources run the gamut; some live very Spartan existences with only enough luxury to allow them to rest between crimes. Others control vast multinational

companies or even small nations. A villain's resources determine what his plans must be — does he need to knock over the First Federal Bank to get the money to hire goons to enable phase two of his scheme? Or can he simply authorize some of his lieutenants to commit a crime on his behalf?

It certainly isn't necessary to delineate how the villain spends every dollar. As you write up his game statistics, you will want to consider his Resources and Followers Backgrounds and what they represent beyond the dots. See "The Villain's Tools" below, for more discussion of this topic.

## Plans

A villain's plans may be mathematically precise and scheduled to the second, or they may be haphazard and more a restatement of the villain's goals than anything else ("My plan is to become fantastically wealthy!"). The sort of plan depends on the other factors described above, as well as on the villain's personality and, if appropriate, Inspired abilities. A super-intelligent mesmerist will do things differently than a former Mafia thug, even if both of them have the same general plan (eliminate the Gambiosi crime family...) and motivation (...so I can take over their territory and get rich).

It may prove useful to consider the villain's plans in terms of conflict with the players' characters: What would this guy be up to that would get the team's attention? Certain Storytellers will actually start at this point and work backward into the villain's resources and motivations. There is nothing wrong with building your own stories in such a fashion. If this is your preference, work out a few interesting scenes where the team might run into the villain or his minions.

## The Villain's Tools

As noted above, any good villain has numerous tools on hand with which to accomplish his fiendish goals. Here are just a few suggestions to get you started.

## Thugs

Thugs come by many names — guns, mooks, but-ton men, goons, rabble, assassins and so on. They are typically interchangeable; most of the time their names involve the phrase "The One With \_\_\_\_" ("The One With The Big Sword," "The One With The Strange Accent," etc.). There is seldom a need to individualize them beyond this, though you are free to do so. Thugs serve as cannon fodder; they help show off how tough the heroes are, and they slow the team down long enough to allow the villain to make his getaway.

Thugs come from all walks of life: The most common ones are mobsters, cultists, mercenaries or (in the wrong cities) the police. They are considered extras (see p. 244); generally all you need are their physical Attributes, type of attack and noteworthy combat skills. "Mooks and Monsters," page 244, has a few sample



goons, though you shouldn't feel limited by such simple listings. If you would like to further personalize Mister Saturday's cadre of undead spies, feel free to do so. But most of the time you will not have to do so.

## Lieutenants

A well-characterized lieutenant can end up as hated as the villain for whom he works — and if the team does away with the villain but doesn't clean up after his henchmen, a lieutenant might well *become* the series' next big villain. A lieutenant does not have to be an Inspired character by any means, but his abilities should be somewhat daunting; he should stand out in a pack of thugs. Unlike an ordinary goon, he should have a name and at least a few defining characteristics. If you're lucky, the team will run into him more than once, so write up a more complete character sheet for any lieutenants your villain may employ.

If you want to follow a simple convention for escalating the challenge the team faces from encounter to encounter, the group should probably run into a group of mooks without any guidance and, later, a gang of thugs led by a lieutenant. This second group is likely to be more organized and, accordingly, is a greater challenge; the gang may set up an ambush or have a workable escape plan. The lieutenant himself is probably the equal of any one member of the heroes' group; should one of them try to take him on alone, that hero will probably lose. But the lieutenant shouldn't be so tough that the whole team couldn't take him down.

A villain with a lot of resources (and/or decent amounts of allies or followers) might well have multiple lieutenants. Try to keep them from being duplicates of one another (unless they're all his *scientifically bred super warriors*...). One lieutenant might be a financial wizard, while another could be the harsh mistress who oversees the thugs, and a third a cunning foreign spy.

## Gadgetry

It's cliché for a villain to possess a Z-wave device he intends to use to take over the world. That doesn't mean you shouldn't apply the gimmick, of course — the polite term for cliché is "classic schtick" — but try not to overdo it. If you do give the villain such a doomsday device, try to make sure that its shutdown process takes some time and skill and is, by itself, a source of suspense for the team. That way, if the device needs to be shut down during a climactic action sequence, those assigned to doing so aren't out of the excitement, but must rely on their cleverness and skill as much as the rest of the team must rely on its combat prowess.

A bit less of a cliché is that the villain and his henchmen all use the same style of unusual equipment. This equipment doesn't have to be super-science gadgetry: perhaps the villain himself is a stalwart with some control over electricity and magnetism and outfits his mooks with silent, deadly gauss pistols instead of the usual Tommy guns and

brass knuckles. This is great further into a series — there's nothing quite like the look on a player's face when he tells the rest of the team, "I know we defeated Baron Ferrous and his crew last year, but the gunmen I faced last night were carrying the very same gauss pistols!"

Try to avoid giving a villain's goons too much wild equipment. The idea is to give them a signature device or to keep the heroes on their toes, not to make thugs invincible. A resourceful villain might equip his thugs with better and better gear as the team successively defeats them, but this takes time and high Resources. It should not happen too often.

## The Secret (or Not-So-Secret) Base

The villain's Resources and/or Sanctum determine his base of operations; the stalker with one dot in these Traits will have little more than a flat in a brownstone somewhere, but the corrupt industrialist or scion of Eastern Hemisphere nobility might have quite the sprawling estate. The base could be obvious: The corrupt industrialist probably plots his wicked schemes from near the top of the skyscraper he owns; the degenerate Slavic noble surely works out of the backlit castle on the promontory. Alternately, the base could be hidden; it might be in the remote wilderness or underground.

For story purposes, the main consideration regarding the villain's base is its accessibility. A highly inaccessible base (very remote or very defensible or both) presents a good challenge to the heroes when the time comes to break in, as they must find it and get through (or past) its defenses. Note that the heroes should not always be forced to fight their way into such a place. It can often be more dramatic to have the characters use non-combat Abilities such as Survival and Stealth and to even apply treacherous environmental hazards (a rope bridge over the chasm, a slippery walk alongside a volcano, etc.). The location of such a base probably presents problems for the villain, after all. He cannot send dozens of troops to harass the heroes in Paris at a moment's notice if his legions are stationed on an island in the South Pacific.

An accessible base gives the villainous mastermind much more freedom of action, at the cost of defensibility and secrecy. The villain who works from the penthouse of a midtown skyscraper must be considerably more circumspect in his activities than one in the jungles of Guatemala — the police tend to ask questions about midnight blood rituals. And that same villain has a harder time stationing anti-aircraft guns and other defenses on his public building. On the other hand, he can probably count on the support of the police and the authorities should a bunch of vigilantes break onto his property with wild accusations of villainy....

As a final note, do not forget one of the most important features of villains' bases: They blow up really well. Nothing concludes a rousing adventure quite like a frenzied escape from a pyrotechnic nightmare.



# CHAPTER

## HEROES AND VILLAINS

# FIGHT

Other forces are at work in the world of **Adventure** aside from your character, individuals and organizations with goals both noble and nefarious. Unless your character lives in a box, he's going to cross paths with these folks sooner or later. It's not just about the obvious struggle of intrepid heroes battling dastardly thugs, either. Conflict can occur among those who are ostensibly on the same side — just because you and the Black Blade agree that Doctor Zorbo must be stopped doesn't mean you agree on how to stop him. Similarly, your character might find himself sympathizing with a villain's agenda or philosophy — is it really so bad that Zorbo seeks to protect the Earth from ecological devastation? That's where this game's greatest drama and excitement come from: the conflict of personality and ideology between characters.

### The Æon Society for Gentlemen

Future generations will regard the Æon Society as a venerable institution. Centuries of philanthropy begin here with a few individuals, each possessing a genius that, for a brief time in human civilization, changes the world. The Æon Society seeks nothing less than the complete realization of humanity's potential.

The core members of the Æon Society are accomplished adventurers, a cut above other Inspired. They should be impressive to players' characters, but they're not gods. We have noted a few specific Traits especially suitable to each character, but they lack explicit Trait listings. Actual skill levels are open to individual interpretation, so that the Storyteller can have these key characters interact with her players' characters at whatever level she feels is appropriate. If the Storyteller wants to toss Mercer some Traits not explicitly mentioned here or change some of them that are, she should feel free. Surprises like that keep players on their toes and make for a more interesting game.

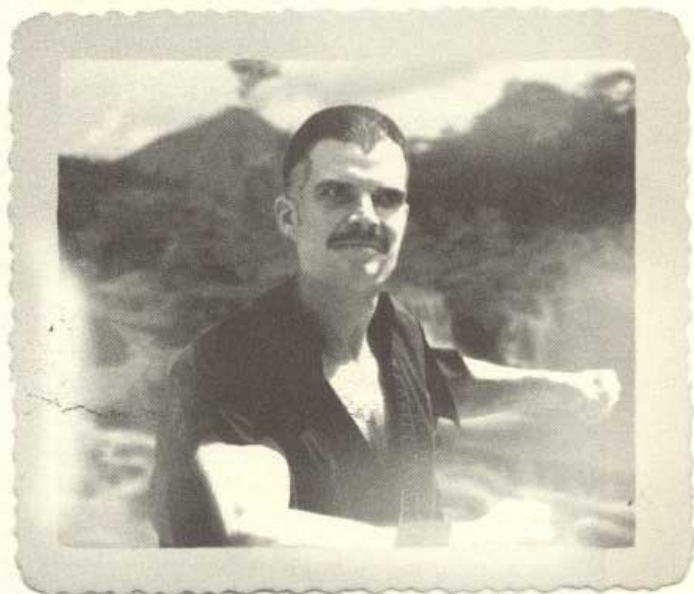
### Maxwell Anderson Mercer

His parents were anthropologists at the University of Chicago, and Mercer accompanied them on their expeditions as soon as he learned to walk. Young Max entertained himself by reading during the long ocean voy-

ages and train rides. His favorite books came in two different varieties — biographies of influential scientists such as Sir Richard Francis Burton and dime novels of heroes such as Safari Jack Tallon.

After a childhood filled with stories of great men and countless trips to exotic locales, Mercer set out to make his own life just as exceptional. He attended Harvard (where he met Michael Donighal) and earned two Ph.D.s in as many years. After graduation, he returned to Chicago to manage his family's fortune for his aging parents, using the profits from their investments to finance municipal projects, including several museums and a monument to William Rainey Harper. The Mercer fortune also funded research, expeditions and charities. Building on the contacts he developed at school, Mercer's social circle soon included innovators in business, politics and the sciences across the Midwest and, later, the world.

Though he had a broad education, in college, Mercer abandoned his childhood love of science for the humanities. Though Mercer kept his interest alive by funding research at the University of Chicago, Hammersmith's invitation in 1922 was like a letter from his first love. Max Mercer traveled to London with his pal Michael Donighal to witness what promised to be an important moment in the advancement of science.





Maxwell Anderson Mercer was front and center when Hammersmith's machine exploded.

He awoke in the backyard of his parent's Chicago brownstone. Inside, he found older versions of his friends and a few who clearly knew him although they had never met. Mercer noticed a man who looked like a younger version of his father. Then, suddenly, he realized he was looking upon himself, years older!

Explaining that it was 1942, Mercer's counterpart introduced him to the Æon Society, an organization Mercer would found a year into his own future, in 1923. This was but the first of many incredible things the elder Mercer revealed to his young counterpart. Possessing the unique ability to shift through time, Mercer tentatively explored history. Always pushing the boundaries of the possible, he visited several eras to come, witnessing both

the achievements and the horrors that awaited mankind. Control over his talent far from perfect, Mercer finally returned to his own time, reappearing six months after he had vanished. Keeping his singular power secret, Mercer quickly laid down the foundations for the organization vital to help guide humanity through the coming centuries — the Æon Society for Gentlemen.

**Traits:** Mercer is unique in that it's unknown what type of Inspired he actually is. Receiving the strongest exposure to telluric energy next to Michael Donighal's, Max Mercer gained the ability to become unstuck in time. In the Adventure Era, Mercer is far from mastering this amazing talent. Some of his associates know that Mercer can move as swiftly as Mercury or "freeze" his opponents, though only Donighal hypothesizes that these abilities might reflect a manipulation of the time stream.

Mercer has several Background enhancements: In Charge, Kingpin, Sanctum Sanctorum and Wealth Beyond Avarice. He is also a master of numerous physical and intellectual disciplines from Eastern martial arts to esoteric anthropological studies to advanced investigation techniques. It's worth noting that Mercer mastered these fields prior to his Inspiration — in fact, it seems that the ability to slip through time is his only paranormal talent (though a powerful and versatile one it is).

## Whitley Styles

Styles & Stafford Imports squeezed every penny it could from British-ruled India. When Roger Styles took his wife and their son Whitley on a trip to locate "exotic oriental commodities," he didn't know that payback was in the offing. The Thuggee cult took Roger's offer to buy their statue of Kali in the worst possible way. They murdered his wife and imprisoned him. Ten years later, two cultists led Roger Styles to the altar room, where he found his son resting in the shadow of Kali. Instead of embracing his father, Whitley denounced Roger as an imperialist and challenged him to ritual combat. Raised by the

## Chronal Awareness (Unique Knack)

*"The future is what you make it."*

Maxwell Anderson Mercer possesses the unique ability to travel the streams of time. He transfers himself most easily to moments of large discharges of telluric energy. Among the most notable are Hammersmith's accident in 1922; the Æon Society's battle against Doctor Primoris in 1943; an attempt to re-create Hammersmith's experiment in 1998; the end of a war between humans and powerful Inspired beings called aberrants in 2061; and a climactic event that changes humanity's course forever in 2122. The effort is extremely difficult and draining, so he doesn't try it very often.

Mercer can also use his control of time for a variety of more immediate effects, such as increasing his speed relative to the normal progression of time or "pausing" time for a few seconds. It is only after decades of practice that he acquires the full potential of his power — eventually, almost any conceivable manipulation of time is his to command!

**System:** Mercer is meant to be unique in this regard; his presence in the later periods of the Æon Continuum via the use of Chronal Awareness heralds dramatic goings-on. White Wolf has two dozen Ph.D.s working around the clock to arrive at a system to represent this power. Until they show some results, this Knack should be reserved for Storyteller characters (preferably only Mercer), and its success or failure, possibilities or limitations, depend solely on the needs of the story.





vile Thuggee, young Whitley slew his own father. He had become the arm of Kali that strangles, the foot of Kali that crushes all.

Max Mercer knew Whitley's parents from previous trips to the Orient and traveled to India after the Great War to search for his missing acquaintances. He located the Thuggee cult too late to save Whitley's parents but was able to free the younger Styles from its evil clutches. Styles grew to adulthood as Mercer's ward, eventually unlearning the cult's murderous prerogatives. He returned to London to claim his birthright, but Uriah Stafford, Roger Styles' partner, had assumed complete control of the import company years before. Stafford had an ironclad case to keep Whitley from his legacy. Resisting his murderous training, Whitley struggled in the courts for years to gain his birthright. He refused any aid from Mercer during this time, taking various menial jobs to make ends meet. In the space of a few years, Styles was many things, including a dockworker, a mason, a day laborer and a miner. Mixing with the working class suited his temperament, giving rise to a self-deprecating attitude and an earthy sense of humor. Still, he never forgot the deadly arts in which the Thuggee trained him. The legal battle took its toll and remained contested when Mercer approached him to join the Æon Society for Gentlemen.

**Traits:** Whitley Styles is a mesmerist with a high Inspiration and the Knacks Cloud the Mind and Telluric Resonance. He is also one of the deadliest martial artists alive and received a top-notch education thanks to Mercer. Styles is most comfortable rubbing shoulders with the lower classes and has extensive contacts as well as a high backing with Æon. Paruq, the Thuggee leader who trained him, and the vile Stafford comprise two separate nemeses.

### Professor Benjamin Franklin Dixon

Professor Dixon (he answers only to his surname

when he answers at all) has never had an impulse to which he did not surrender immediately. He is the most spontaneous and original inventor of his day. His plans for a solar-powered gyroplane are brown and crinkled, the victims of sloshed hooch. The ash from Cuban cigars smears his lab notes. When his prototype telluric-ionic battery began to leak, he papered the floor with girlie magazines. His office has stains on the walls about which no one inquires.

After a week of nagging from Hephaestia Geary-Wexler, Dixon chose Dr. Hammersmith's laboratory over the trenches of the Great War, joining his future wife as an assistant to the father of the Age of Inspiration. Not fully able to suppress his urge to stick it to the Kaiser, Dixon used Hammersmith's facilities to invent all sorts of gadgets with military applications, including a treaded general purpose vehicle that could overcome barbed wire and a few serviceable treatments for victims of mustard gas.

In exchange for its much-needed informality, Dixon now lends his talent for martial invention to the Æon Society. In the aftermath of the Hammersmith disaster, Mercer sought out Dixon for insight into his employer's experiments and was so impressed with the young scientist that he invited him to join his nascent organization. Though being in such august company has tempered the wildness of his intoxicated youth, Dixon's timely flashes of insight are invariably followed with a cry of "To the vomitorium!"

**Traits:** His associates would say that Dixon was born Inspired. He is a stalwart with a handful of Inspired powers, including Mad Scientist. He is possibly the world's most talented scientist and engineer, with a high Inspiration, many inventions and multiple gadgets. Dixon's reputation has frustrated his ex-wife to no end — and since he hasn't coped well with their disastrous relationship either, the two share the Nemesis Background. Judging by his daily intake of nicotine and alcohol, Dixon also has a prodigious Resistance.

### Danger Ace

Jake Stefokowski volunteered for the Lafayette Escadrille and emerged as America's first hotshot pilot in the Great War. His commander suppressed Jake's kill tally once he learned how young the gangly lad really was. When Mercer asked a chum in the Army Air Corps for someone suitable for a "delicate, quite possibly dangerous flight through the mysterious Sargasso Sea," the pilot had an instant recommendation. Mercer stole Jake away from his lackadaisical barnstorming and has since sent him on numerous missions, most of them to places far worse than the Sargasso Sea.

Though Jake lacks the visionary zeal of his fellow Æon members, his sheer enthusiasm for adventure more than makes up for it. He is perhaps the only associate with what Professor Dixon calls a "double genius." That







is, his talent as an aviator and his talent for surviving certain death. His fellows have thought the "Danger Ace" dead at least a dozen times, only to see his tattered plane coming over the horizon yet again. In fact, Jake Stefokowski proves to be one of the Æon Society's most durable members. Decades later, the world knows him as Jake Danger, Aberrant Hunter.

**Traits:** Danger Ace is a daredevil with any or all of the Death Defiance, Eagle Eyes, Navigation Hazard and Wheelman (Barnstormer) Knacks. Danger Ace is a pilot and navigator almost without equal.

## Crackshot

The prettiest member of the Æon Society for Gentlemen, Annabelle Lee Newfield's beauty is matched only by the training she enjoyed from her contortionist father and acrobat mother. Her dexterous flare began with a youth full of whip tricks, lion tamings and dinners eaten with silverware held by toes. In many ways, Annabelle regards the Society's endeavors as just an-

other circus act, a tightrope with no net below. Annabelle was invited to join the Æon Society at the tender age of 14 — not for "purposes relating to pederasty," as Doctor Primoris suggested, but rather, to give lie to Safari Jack's claim that "the fairer sex is of far more use after, never during, the safari." Although Safari Jack still treats her with a polite condescension, Annabelle has more than proven her worth. Her talent with weapons of all kinds — one just as prodigious as Professor Dixon's inventiveness or Jake Stefokowski's piloting — leaves no doubt that women have a place in the Æon Society for Gentlemen.

Though her incautious ways lead her to a bad end shortly before World War II, Newfield brings youth and energy — and a female perspective — to Mercer's club for gentlemen.

**Traits:** Crackshot, as her nickname implies, is a daredevil with the Lightning Reflexes, Trick Shot and Universally Deadly Knacks. She has Ability mastery in Archery, Firearms and Athletics, but her other Abilities and Backgrounds are somewhat undeveloped.

## Safari Jack Tallon

One of Mercer's first invitations to join Æon went to his childhood idol, Safari Jack Tallon. His exploits were the stuff of popular men's fiction even back in the Victorian Era. He explored those places lesser men feared. Safari Jack made maps of the most inhospitable regions when Africa was still "the Dark Continent." From shamans in the Amazon, he learned antidotes for the most exotic poisons. The Aborigines of Australia call him the Dream-Lizard. He vacations in the steppes of Tibet.



Though Jack isn't the sojourner he used to be, a variety of longevity treatments he discovered through his explorations keep him vigorous despite his advanced (indeterminate) age. Though he still embarks on the oc-





casional safari, Jack Tallon more often plays the elder statesmen of the Æon Society — though one with a penchant for arm-wrestling and headlocks. His experience tempers the impetuosity of associates such as Jake Stefokowski and Annabelle Lee Newfield. Tallon articulates his own version of the Society's vision for better world, using his folk hero-dom to encourage "white civilization" to seek "the simple wisdom of the colored world" and, in exchange, lend it the technological expertise to raise its "appalling standard of living."

**Traits:** Safari Jack is a daredevil with Fists of Stone, Indomitable Will, Resilient and Steely Gaze. He is also a sort of violent Renaissance man, particularly skilled in Athletics, Awareness, Endurance, Etiquette, Linguistics, Medicine and Navigation. His Backgrounds are equally diverse, including extensive Contacts, Influence and Reputation. His daily regimen of exotic remedies is considered a gadget that gives him the equivalent of the dynamic Knack Optimized Metabolism.

## Doctor Primoris

Michael Daemon Donighal, using the inflated pseudonym "Doctor Primoris" in partial mockery of his fellows, is on a doomed course, becoming ever more alienated from his humanity to the point that the rest of the Æon Society rises against him in the dark days of World War II. Before that time, Donighal acts as the Æon Society's devil's advocate, its voice of dissent. He skewers the group's optimistic — Donighal says naïve — plans in a well-meaning, if abrasive, attempt to show its members the error of their ways.



Like Mercer, Donighal was exposed to a massive concentration of Z-waves in Hammersmith's fateful blast. Also like Mercer, he emerged as something not quite quantifiable. He is almost certainly a stalwart, but one as far beyond the typical stalwart's power as a stalwart is beyond the common man. Like his alias implies, Doctor Primoris has surpassed human perfection in both mind

and body. His physical form is a combination of ultimate strength, grace and beauty. The same could be said of his mind. Even among the Æon Society, only a few individuals have anything to say that Donighal considers worth hearing.

Donighal idolizes, some say adores, Mercer. He wants to believe that Mercer, perhaps the ultimate Renaissance man and embodiment of hope in the new century, can capitalize on this Inspired age, making Hammersmith's accident into humanity's salvation rather than its slow destruction. But the wounds of Donighal's past, his unrequited love for his friend and his singular genius force him to keep the Æon Society's goals at arm's length. They are, for him, an exercise rather than a crusade. Donighal will find his passion soon enough. Somewhere inside him lurks a dark god, frustrated now, but nearing the day that it will explode like Hammersmith's machine.

**Traits:** In addition to most of the level one and two dynamic Knacks, "Doctor Primoris" has dynamic versions of many psychic Knacks! Such Knacks make him sensitive to the workings of the physical universe and include Marked Man and Telluric Resonance. Before the Hammersmith disaster, young Michael Donighal was a well-educated prodigy. Now, he is the unparalleled master of a variety of fields. Although the usually perceptive Mercer has yet to realize the extent of Donighal's transformation, he already suspects that his younger friend is holding himself back.

## Persons of Distinction and Infamy

Here are some of the personalities that make the post-Hammersmith era so interesting. Some are outright villains, with plans to enrich themselves at the expense of others. Some are misguided visionaries, seeking to bring their own disagreeable Utopias to reality. A few couldn't be described as villain or visionary, but prove to be constant foils to the Inspired nonetheless. As with the Æon Society members, these characters are intentionally left without detailed Trait write-ups, so the Storyteller may add to or change the ones presented as she sees fit.

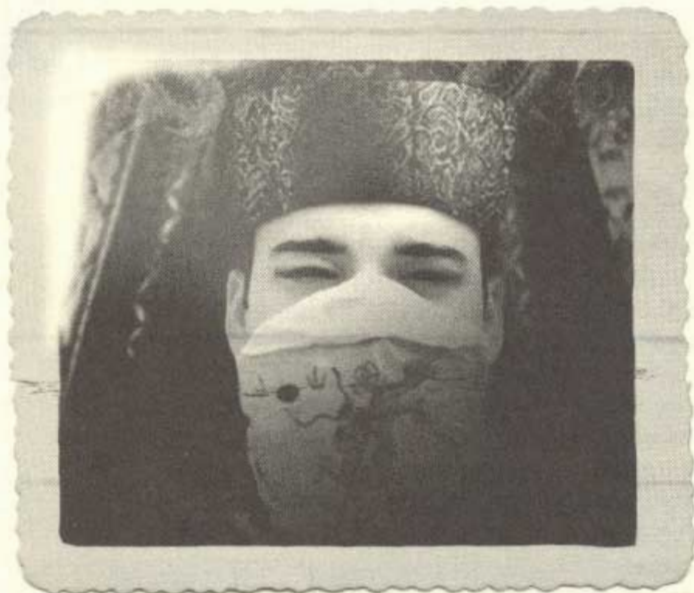
### The Ubiquitous Dragon

A figure with a past shrouded in darkest mystery, the Ubiquitous Dragon is the polar opposite of Maxwell Mercer. While Mercer is a man of science, the Dragon believes that his abilities are gifts from ancient demons. While Mercer uses his gifts to elevate mankind, the Dragon uses his to inspire dread in the Eastern underworld. Like Mercer, the Dragon has a vision of a world transformed, but the Asian crime lord's intent is quite different. He explores the duality of human nature — the desire for enlightenment, yet the tendency for corruption. He believes that everyone is fundamentally



flawed, pawns in a struggle that transcends the physical realm. The Ubiquitous Dragon explores these flaws in hopes of discovering the goal of the forces that manipulate mankind... so he might control them, as he does his own Inspired gifts.

A youth spent learning about honor and duty from his father was lost when a warlord massacred his entire village — all but the boy who would become the Dragon. As it happened, the Dragon's father had been the warlord's advisor but fled with one of his concubines years before. The warlord took the boy and taught him everything he knew in an effort to make the son the antithesis of his honorable father. The warlord taught that all people were victims of vice and corruption. He taught that no one was innocent and that everyone had a price. He taught that knowledge was power and that only the strong deserved to rule. In the end, the warlord succeeded beyond his expectations. The young Dragon marked his passage into manhood by spilling the blood of the second man he'd called father. The Ubiquitous Dragon's influence spread quickly throughout the East. He is now absolute master of the Chinese underworld and has loyal servants, who fear failure more than death, across every stratum of society in the Pacific Rim.



It's unclear if the Dragon was Inspired by Hammersmith's event or if he was always this way. Regardless, he already controlled much of the Eastern underworld by the early 1920s. His hand can be found in everything from drug trafficking and the theft of precious artifacts to assassinations and government coups. He seduces the seemingly incorruptible with promises of power, wealth, fame — whatever is dearest to their hearts and most likely to awaken the weakness within them. Along with his most loyal followers, members of the dread Dragon's Coil Tong, he has been spotted in every corner of the globe, personally overseeing opium

deliveries to San Francisco, extracting shares from the Ponatowski Foundation, attending the Machinatrix's latest experiment — and more! Some believe that the Ubiquitous Dragon has "doubles," servants handpicked for their resemblance or perhaps surgically sculpted after his likeness and intended to foil assassination attempts and further his reputation for being ever-present. The truth is perhaps the Dragon's greatest secret.

## The Curse of Many Dragons (Level Three Dynamic Knack)

*"To defeat you, I need only myself."*

With this power, the Ubiquitous Dragon can spontaneously generate multiple versions of himself. These duplicates resemble the Dragon in every way, though they are not as durable or as permanent as the original. His duplicates are the only people the Dragon trusts.

**System:** Spend a point of Inspiration, and roll Endurance. If successful, a duplicate manifests and is ready to act on the next turn. On a botch, the Dragon takes a level of bashing damage for each "1" rolled. A duplicate lasts a number of days equal to the successes rolled. The original Dragon may sustain a duplicate "in the field" by spending one Inspiration per day before the duplicate's time is up. (The duplicate may not spend Inspiration to sustain itself.)

A duplicate may be created anywhere up to 500 kilometers times the Dragon's Inspiration rating, though the original must be intimately familiar with the site (typically, he must have spent at least one straight week there). If created in direct contact with the original, the duplicate appears after one turn; otherwise, it takes one hour to manifest. Once created, a duplicate may travel any distance from the original. The Dragon and his duplicates enjoy no telepathic contact; any communication must follow standard means (telephone, letter, telegraph). The Dragon can reabsorb a duplicate in person, thereby gaining all of its memories and experiences.

A duplicate is identical to the Dragon, but falls under the rules for extras (see p. 244) and has half the original's Inspiration score. A duplicate has only one health level prior to final manifestation. If a duplicate falls to incapacitated or hasn't recombined before its time is up, it dissolves into noxious goo, and the Dragon suffers one level of lethal damage (this may not be soaked).



The Inspired have recently captured the Dragon's interest. Those he can subvert become his loyal lieutenants, and those who resist him are marked for destruction. Rare souls such as Mercer puzzle the Dragon, individuals who retain hope in the direst of circumstances and who resist temptation in pursuit of higher goals.

**Traits:** Though the Dragon believes his powers come from Asian spirits, he is actually a stalwart with the Knacks Aetheric Vision, Indisputable Analysis, Optimized Metabolism and Sun Tzu's Blessing. He is also the keeper of The Curse of Many Dragons (see sidebar). Like the King of the World, the Dragon has a number of Backgrounds (notably Cipher) and enhancements (including Kingpin and Sanctum Sanctorum). He is also superhumanly intelligent and highly skilled in Awareness, Investigation and Subterfuge, and he enjoys Ability mastery in Martial Arts, Disguise and Arts.

## The King of the World

Almost every criminal organization in the Western Hemisphere answers to the arch-criminal the IDA calls "the King of the World." Mafia bosses from Italy and New York send the King Christmas cards with their tribute. If a dollar is stolen from a wallet in Chicago, the King of the World gets a penny. If a carton of cigarettes falls off a truck in Hamburg, the King gets a pack. This shadow monarch has eluded capture for years. Indeed, little proves that he even exists. To catch "him," the governments of the Earth might want to revise their profile: The King is really a Queen.

Lady Argentine de Winter is one of wealthiest women of Old Europe, the daughter of exiled French aristocracy. She is also the guiding force behind the Contedorri. At age five, she accompanied her father to London's Club Caprice, where she looted the coatroom, rifling through the pockets of the most powerful men and women from the continent. Though specifics are the subject of back-alley mythology and speakeasy hearsay, this precocious young thief rose quickly through the ranks, catching the fancy of an old Mafia don here and funding the hijacking of a train there, using her influence to authorize ventures that banks would never approve. Old Europe has always had two rulers — the crown and the hood. The first she earned by birth, the second through her cosmopolitan connections to the world's every grift. The cartel kingpins even whisper to one another that the Dragon and she have divided the world among themselves.

**Traits:** Lady de Winter is a mesmerist with a truly enchanting demeanor. Aside from the Knacks Cloud the Mind and Hypnotic Presence, she has pretty much every subterfuge-related Knack you'd care to name (and a few more beyond). Plus, she has a special psychic Knack equivalent to Sex Symbol. In addition to her unmatched prowess at stealing and selling treasures and information, the "King" enjoys the Background enhancements Enigma, In Charge, Kingpin and Wealth Beyond Avarice.

## The Two Worlds of Crime

Both Branch 9 and the IDA have task forces assigned to discovering how two master criminals, the King of the World and the Ubiquitous Dragon, have come to share the globe. Though their minions constantly squabble at their territorial fringes, the arrangement allows each side to kill trespassers with impunity, thus giving their associates a strong incentive to stick to their own turf. Of course, each crime lord crosses the agreed-upon boundaries when the mood suits them. Clearly, there is no honor among thieves.

Conflict at the borders — particularly the West Coast of the United States — heats up as time marches on. Each criminal kingpin reaches the pinnacle of power by the mid-1930s, and there's only one place to turn for new territory — the other half of the globe. The escalating struggle for ultimate control that ensues is sure to draw in heroes and villains alike.

## Mister Saturday

To look him in the eye is to fall under his spell. He can trap your soul in a bottle. Not even the dead can escape his voodoo. Once a man called Jackson Harley, he served as a butler at Sir Calvin Hammersmith's London mansion. By "controlling" the arbiters of the estate after the fateful experiment, he became the old scientist's sole heir, owner of Hammersmith's home, his wealth, even what remains of his machine. After seizing control of the estate, Saturday née Harley had Hammersmith's mansion transported brick by brick to a hill overlooking Black Storm Bay, a tiny village in Haiti that he rules through fear of his sinister magic.





Mister Saturday's "black magic" mystifies the greatest minds of the day. Professor Dixon insists the so-called voodoo has a scientific explanation. Yet, beyond the makeup of the man's unusual powers lie still more questions: Did he play any role in the explosion of Hammersmith's machine? Was Hammersmith just another one of his legion of puppets? Mister Saturday's agenda is as mysterious as his origins. He portrays himself as an island Robin Hood, stealing from wealthy America to aid the impoverished Caribbean. However, that doesn't stop him from working deals with everyone from the Czar to the Ubiquitous Dragon. Saturday sells gangs of his zombies to mob bosses and others in need of unthinking armies. These creatures invariably begin to rot after a few months, requiring constant replacement (and providing a steady stream of income for the voodoo master). Some Æon associates regard him as an unlawful, unconventional folk hero with the interests of the poorer regions of the Western Hemisphere at heart; others believe that those who tolerate him do so because they are under his spell.

**Traits:** Mister Saturday is one of the most powerful mesmerists alive. His "voodoo," actually a broad array of psychic Knacks, includes all the level one Knacks and many from levels two and three — most notably Cloak of Dread, Evil Eye, Hypnotic Presence and Psychic Control. In addition, he has the Background enhancements Legions (his "zombies," corpses animated with a super-scientific concoction and Inspiration) and Sanctum Sanctorum (Hammersmith's mansion, complete with any number of that lost genius' inventions).

## The Lone Gunman

Scalper Dutch shoots fast for an old man. The man fires his six-guns faster than a Thompson, and he rarely needs so many rounds to take down his targets. Due to his age and spryness, most people figure he must be Inspired. Wherever his skill comes from, one thing's sure: He's the meanest bastard you'll ever run across.

Whether running farmers off their land, policing coolie workers or hijacking Wells Fargo wherever they conducted business, Dutch broke every law they ever passed. The Wild West has been tamed since then, but not Scalper Dutch. Even in the 1920s, the world has need for a hired gun. He's cheap and gets the job done, and he's just too ornery to die. To this day, he's a popular freelance enforcer all over the Americas. He'd have plenty of work across the globe if he didn't hate boats and planes. If he can't ride there or take a train, he's not interested.

When Doctor Zorbo attacked New York, Dutch climbed the Statue of Liberty and shot down three dirigibles — then attacked the Æon Society members who dared approach him afterward. Why? He took off before anyone could ask him. Dutch has apparently got something to prove, though no one knows what or to whom.

**Traits:** Scalper Dutch may well have been Inspired even before Hammersmith's event. He is a daredevil with a maxed-out Destructive facet and unparalleled ratings in Athletics, Brawl, Endurance, Firearms and Intimidation. He has the Knacks Untouchable — which functions even if he's armed! — Lightning Reflexes, Perfect Poise, Resilient, Steely Gaze and Trick Shot. He is possibly the world's best marksman. He's also a son of bitch.

## The Czar

The wild eyes of a pervert leer from the pubic mess of his hair. His beard reaches to his knees. He is the Russia the world has lost — enraged, fierce, ready to protect itself no matter what drudgery or bloodshed the task demands. His wild appearance and feral demeanor provide a jarring contrast to the man's pedigree. When Lenin and his thugs brought down Czar Nicholas in the 1917 rebellion, Ivan Boris Vladimir Staynskaya — the aristocrat who now calls himself "the Czar" — fled to the Balkans, smuggling out as many of the Crown's expensive snoods as he could. The greatest treasure he smuggled was no less than Nicholas' last surviving daughter, Anastasia, who he secreted in the outermost shell of a babushka doll. Soon, Staynskaya will have amassed sufficient wealth and spread his influence through Russia to such a degree that he will be a proper suitor for the young princess. Then Staynskaya will have what he always wanted, what his father always wanted, and what his father's father always wanted: an irrefutable claim to the title of czar!

Also called "the Black Wolf" and "the Mongol," Staynskaya believes that the Soviet experiment will crumble. He uses his quiet control of the Ponatowski Foundation to provide him with the financial wherewithal to hasten this eventuality — and thereby hasten his own ascension to the throne of Russia and, someday, the world. These efforts have involved him with various criminal enterprises, bringing him into contact with the Ubiquitous Dragon and Lady de Winter — not always positively. His unorthodox approach is useful to each crime lord to





the extent that they overlook the frustrations he causes when he takes actions that disrupt their plans.



### The Czar and Princess Anastasia

Usually seen roaring directives at his underlings like a rampaging bear, the Czar is notably gentle in the presence of Anastasia. With her, he recovers his noble bearing and the proud lineage of Mother Russia shines through.

Scarred by the trauma of the revolution, the young princess sees Staynskaya as her only true source of safety. The excitement of the world outside threatens to lure her from the Czar's control, though. She grows more self-confident as she grows older, and overheard tales of the Inspired spark thoughts of adventure within her as well. Staynskaya bears Anastasia's increasing willfulness in strained silence. After he becomes the true czar, he can put her in her proper place.

The funds the Czar gets from his pursuits — monies from heists, kidnappings, blackmail and more — are used to bribe Soviet officials (and keep himself and the young Princess Anastasia living in high style). His agents corrupt customs inspectors and party bigwigs alike. He uses this leverage to keep the communist experiment inefficient and unbalanced. He hopes to damage the bureaucracy so badly that another rebellion returns the motherland to the monarchy. Just as he advances his agenda in Russia, the Czar's loyal followers on Ponatowski expeditions sow the seeds of

unrest against authorities elsewhere in the world whose views the Czar disagrees with.

**Traits:** Though not Inspired himself, Staynskaya possesses prodigious levels of Contacts, Followers, Resources and Sanctum, as well as secret Backing in the Ponatowski Foundation and other legitimate and criminal concerns. He does have at least three Inspired bodyguards as allies, two of whom "protect" the fair Anastasia at all times.

### The Machinatrix

Professor Dixon has competition for the title of World's Greatest Inventor — his ex-wife, Doctor Hephaestia Geary-Wexler. While her former husband focuses on the possibilities of Z-waves, Hephaestia works with the realities of what she calls "metachinery." Her most important invention to date is the "Sanguine Prometheus," a mechanical configuration that channels "Ubiquitous Hammersmith Radiation" to give machinery something like sentient intelligence. This nascent technology requires peculiar materials and must be constantly maintained; her Promethean machines aren't smart enough to maintain themselves and display only *apparent* intelligence rather than actual thought.

Hephaestia foresees a world run by Sanguine metachinery: cities that power themselves, trolleys that move and stop according to the passengers' requests, gins that collect and de-seed cotton on their own, "collectors" that recognize when a crime is being committed and apprehend (and punish) the offender. In this clockwork world, even the lowliest person now suffering in poverty could find gainful employment as a mechanic servicing these machines. The entire world could enjoy a lifestyle that not even the United States can now claim, with the elite free to ponder the Sanguine Prometheus and continually improve this efficient tomorrow.



Hephaestia infrequently aids her ex-husband's club with the loan of information or some technology that



Dixon lacks the time or knowledge to create. More often, she meets them coming the other way in her guise as the Machinatrix, selling her genius to the highest bidder with little concern over what her inventions are to be used for. Less shady funding comes from the scientifically curious elite in her newly adopted home of San Francisco. Only the criminal elements with whom she deals and the Æon Society itself know the truth of her dual identity. Frustratingly (for Dixon in particular), the few times the Society's caught her in an illegal venture, she has had an ace in the hole — typically information or a hostage — guaranteeing her freedom. What began as a love-hate relationship with her ex-husband has grown to encompass all the Æon Society's core members.

**Traits:** Dr. Geary-Wexler is a stalwart with the Indisputable Analysis and Mad Scientist dynamic Knacks, among others. She has numerous inventions and some truly significant gadgets. Among her most impressive are miniscule metachinery she has surgically implanted in her body, giving her the equivalent of the Optimized Metabolism and Reptilian Regeneration dynamic Knacks.

### Manifest Destiny

"The war to end all wars? Hardly. Communists control Russia and will soon control China. The Fascist powers of Old Europe arise once more. Weimar Germany is ready to collapse. With the rest of the world embracing the various forms of totalitarianism, the American lifestyle will soon be a thing of the past, a brief dream before the sleeper awakens to an oppressive world regime."

When Senator Ernest Warren Caldwell spoke out against America's isolationism and of the need for an American empire to be built before that "oppressive world regime" arose, his fellow Senators laughed him off the floor. Caldwell knew then that he needed to display the courage that his fellows lacked. He needed to establish the American empire himself. On July 4th, 1923, E. W. Caldwell and his Manifest Destiny Infantry (composed of Great War veterans and lead by an officer's corps of sympathetic writers and academics) landed on the tiny Pacific islands of Bikini Atoll, slaughtered the leaders of the indigenous population and planted an American flag. Using Bikini as a base, the Manifest Destiny Infantry made other military conquests of nearby undefended regions, working its way south, apparently to Antarctica. The group now controls areas of Timor and several dozen unpopulated islands.

Though the President and Congress denounce Caldwell as a terrorist, a few of those in power, including two Army generals, quietly keep Manifest Destiny supplied with vehicles. Various wealthy and influential members of the upper crust are also quietly sympathetic to Caldwell's cause.

**Traits:** E. W. Caldwell is a daredevil with the following Background enhancements: In Charge and Legions. He also has high resources and numerous sanctums in the

South Pacific (and one tucked away in Montana), with an eye toward establishing a couple sanctums sanctorum in Antarctica, Australia and anywhere else he can get away with it. Though he apparently possesses no Knacks, Caldwell's terrible Charisma, the fears of the American people and the world's unwillingness to ignite another Great War more than make up for the lack.

### The Jaguar Queen

In the deepest reaches of southern Mexico, hidden within jungle swamps abandoned by explorers as impenetrable or useless, rumors of a "Jaguar Queen" have persisted for centuries. According to the stories, "Ocelotl," as the natives call her, is the daughter of a jaguar knight, a member of a special order of Aztec warriors, both common and high bred, who devoted themselves to the protection and defense of Aztec royalty. Her mother was an Aztec queen who defied her king and bore the child of her servant. Both parents were executed, but their daughter escaped down a passage between this world and the afterlife formed by her parents' passing spirits. There, she became the immortal bride of the Jaguar, which in Aztec legend is an emissary between the lands of the living and the dead.

The wave of telluric energy seems to have made this legend into a strange kind of reality. Natives now spread the tale of a mystic lineage of "jaguar women" who emerge from the trackless rain forest only to mate. Explorers of a romantic bent speculate that these women may actually follow the lifecycle of the jaguar, living in isolation, coming out to mate and then disappearing to rear offspring and die.

Further rumors talk of her male children, "jaguar men" supposedly responsible for unexplained deaths and used as bogeymen to terrify children. Yet, claims have been made in recent months, sightings of humanoid creatures with the heads and upper bodies of jaguars and the lower bodies of men! Most dismiss these reports and say that the deaths are murders either by a cult that worships the so-called Jaguar Queen or by persons exploiting the "myth" for their own purposes. It's certainly true that those who have attempted to explore or develop the fringes of the jungle swamps in which Ocelotl is rumored to dwell have met with misfortune and even death.

**Traits:** Ocelotl is a stalwart with the knacks A Single Bound, Heightened Senses, (Wo)Man for All Seasons, Sex Symbol, Optimized Metabolism and Threat Awareness. She possesses high Physical and Mental Attributes and is quite skilled in Awareness, Animal Handling, Brawl, Might, Stealth and Survival. She also has Menagerie to represent myriad animal companions (though not necessarily jaguars) loyal to her and Sanctum for her vast jungle home.

### The Turk

Once Istanbul knew him as a man of peace, who shared the blessings of Allah with the ignorant. Since the Hammersmith disaster, the world has come to know him



as simply “the Turk” (lazy Westerners find Imam Khwarazmi ibn Abi Tirmidhi difficult to pronounce). He is the ringleader of a band of assassins that has murdered producers of girlie movies in Los Angeles and the owners of coca plantations in Tijuana. Though fanatics in his homeland would gladly fulfill his every decree, the Turk’s assassinations in the West are usually performed by someone close the victim. Most of these assassins take their own lives after completing their assignments. The source of such conversions isn’t the Turk’s many passionate speeches. The secret is ostensibly a Turkish blend called “jihad” — a black, sticky hash that fills the smoker with a holy rage against the excesses of the West.

In truth, the jihad acts as a focus for the Inspired powers ibn Abi Tirmidhi unknowingly gained through exposure to telluric energy during Hammersmith’s experiment. The Turk can manipulate the thoughts of others, converting even the unwitting into suicidal assassins. Sarah Gettel, once a victim of jihad herself, describes the feeling as “an inescapable sense of duty to a god that all at once becomes real... real *angry*, that is!”

Safari Jack Tallon met the Imam in his travels before the Hammersmith event and noted firsthand the dramatic personality change ibn Abi Tirmidhi underwent. Tallon mistakenly believes the Turk went insane from exposure to Z-waves. In truth, ibn Abi Tirmidhi acts out of a fear that has haunted him since he witnessed the explosion of Hammersmith’s device. He fears the chaos of the future, so he lashes out at the culture that creates it.



**Traits:** The Turk is a mesmerist with a number of mind-influencing Knacks. Most significant is a highly refined Psychic Control that turns the subject into a zealous assassin (the jihad hash makes the subject more susceptible to the brainwashing). He also has a very high Inspiration and high levels of the Followers and Influence Backgrounds.

### Master of the Inner Earth

Hammond Banes was a librarian and would-be science-fiction writer who enjoyed minor celebrity in 1921 for his character “Baron Halcyon, Master of the Under-World.” The fame proved fleeting, so he sought to refine his earlier short fiction into an epic work that would validate him as a creator and provide for his young wife and aging father. His father’s death triggered increasingly irrational behavior, and he soon lost his job and his wife. *The Chronicles of the Under-World*, a massive “history” that he toiled away at night and day, took over everything. Descending into madness, Banes became convinced that the Inner Earth *was real*.

The energy released in Hammersmith’s fateful experiment found him in the depths of insanity and left him forever transformed. He appeared in the lower depths of the Chiquibul caves, Hammond Banes no more — instead, Baron Halcyon awakened in the “under-world”! Halcyon found a race of subterranean albinos living in the lower reaches of the seemingly endless cave system. He called them the “Goran” after a similar race in his writings and declared himself their “master and protector.” The so-called Goran weren’t sure what to make of this stranger, but none who opposed him could stand against his Inspired might. Halcyon led them into the realm of Neanderthal-like raiders — who Halcyon named the “Nawls” — who lived in the caves’ upper reaches.



The Goran had tamed dire wolves to act as protectors against the savage Nawls, but it was Baron Halcyon’s prowess that drove back the Neanderthals. With success came support and loyalty; soon, the Goran labeled the foreigner a hero. The self-styled Baron proved a harsh despot when crossed, and some Goran slipped from his rule to more distant reaches of the Inner Earth. Among these was the young Gar, who seeks to free his people



from rule by this unhinged surface man. Halcyon faces more conflict as explorers from the surface have appeared. Chief among them is Doctor Zorbo, who the Baron knows only as a possible usurper interested in harvesting the light crystals that so populate the cave.

What will become of these various conflicts remains unknown. A mystery of equal measure is whether Banes dreamed the "under-world" and its civilizations into existence, had some precognition of them or is merely the victim of madness and circumstance.

**Traits:** Baron Halcyon is stalwart whose Knacks include Body of Bronze, Heightened Senses, Piledriver, Sun Tzu's Blessing and Threat Awareness. He also speaks the Gorans' simple language and "rock speech" — a kind of Morse code that echoes through the caves. His Backgrounds and enhancements include Influence over the Goran, Resources befitting a king, the Sanctum Sanctorum of the deep caves and the mighty Gar as his Nemesis.

## The Mighty Gar, Lord of the World Below

Gar is one of the E'tah, the race Baron Halcyon calls the "Goran." His family retreated from the rule of the mad Baron Halcyon only to be set upon by a starving Neanderthal tribe. Only young Gar escaped, falling through a crack in the cave wall to land, broken and bleeding, on a massive collection of cave crystals. The ruby crystals provided light in the deep Inner Earth, and they gave Gar something more: strength. Even dazed and ruined, he felt the throb of energy around him and drew upon it. Miraculously, his wounds healed, and he arose, stronger and more powerful than he — or any E'tah — had ever been. Gar returned from the secret crystal pit to seek revenge against the Neanderthals who slew his family and the man who forced them to flee: Baron Halcyon. He found his childhood companion, the dire wolf Tak, awaiting him when he emerged from an opening kilometers from where he'd fallen. Though Gar looked different — taller, more massive, with alabaster skin whiter than even the palest of his race and eyes that reflected the rich red of the crystal he now wore about his neck — Tak welcomed his master without reservation.

Gar sought others who hid from Halcyon and the Neanderthals. His strength and intelligence gave his people hope, and they learned to defend themselves against the encroaching Nawls. In his quest, Gar learned why the Neanderthals acted as they did. The savages struck against the E'tah to survive. The upper caves did not enjoy the richness of lichens and fungi, of bizarre underworld animals and subterranean lakes and rivers that provided the E'tah with sustenance. The Neanderthals were starving, and Halcyon's continued aggression left them with fewer resources.

Then Gar discovered the opening to the world above. The lush jungle suggested a solution. The surface world is too bright for the E'tah except in darkest night,

but the Neanderthals could make a new life there. If his race's enemies would move to the surface, they would no longer starve, and the conflict would end. Halcyon would be the last obstacle to peace. But relations with Nawl tribes prove tentative at best and often dissolve into conflict. Though several E'tah clans have gathered under Gar's rule and some Nawl tribes have ventured into the surface jungles, the world below remains divided. Then have come strange beings from above, people neither E'tah nor Nawl, who are interested in the secrets of the Inner Earth. Only time will tell if Gar can unite his people and transform the Chiquibul cave system from a savage, divided place into a civilization that can thrive in the world below — and what role the surface world will play in the affair.

**Traits:** Gar was Inspired as a stalwart when he fell into the crystal pit, a locus of concentrated telluric energy. This cavern remains his secret sanctum, a place of power and contemplation. He has the Aetheric Vision, Blindfighter, Powerlifter, Superhuman Reflexes and Reptilian Regeneration Knacks. The crystal he wears is a gadget, a natural telluric battery that further enhances his impressive abilities. He has many followers in the scattered E'tah tribes and has a reputation among his race and the Nawls. His menagerie consists primarily of Tak, though he can call upon other dire wolves to aid him. Gar is also extremely intelligent and intuitive.

## Tyrant of the Skies

The world's population will double by the end of the 20th century. At that rate, Earth could become one gigantic city by the end of the millennium. Emerging innovations might accommodate such a society, but what will humans do for air? As Doctor Manfred von Zorbo is painfully aware, people can't breathe without trees. He grew up in the Black Forest of Germany. Trees surrounded his family's estate for kilometers. The air was fresh. Much fresher than the air in London, where Doctor Zorbo traveled many years later to witness Hammersmith's famous demonstration. Zorbo was already well known for combining the two German practicalities — sociology and engineering — into innovative solutions for a dying world. He designed various modes of mass transportation and tenements that could house the populations of small cities (even if they were a little claustrophobic).

Exposure to Z-waves at Hammersmith's demonstration must have unhinged Zorbo's already frenetic brain because, in the months that followed, he published increasingly inaccessible screeds about the solutions to the problems of overpopulation and over-industrialization, including one whose title became his battle cry. When Zorbo invaded New York in March of 1925 with an armada of zeppelins — apparently a response to the universal denunciation of his theories and a critique of urban civilization — his bullhorn rumbled with the now-infamous phrase:

"Menschheit! Zum Himmel!" or "Humanity! To the sky!"





He believed a floating city could sustain a manageable population. Mankind's best hope was to abandon the earth altogether and take to the skies, leaving the verdant planet below untouched. Doctor Zorbo stumbled onto a hydrogen purification process that, among other things, allowed a dirigible to stay aloft for almost a month at a time. His research to discover an even more effective lift process finally led him to the hidden Chiquibul cave system. The good doctor thinks that by harnessing the power of the crystals he can sustain multiple sky cities indefinitely. If only the current residents weren't so intent on getting in his way!

**Traits:** Doctor Zorbo is a mesmerist with the Knacks Psychic Synergy, Inspirational Aura and Scientific Prodigy. He also has a gadget with the dynamic Knack Aetheric Vision. Zorbo has numerous followers (his Sky Brigade) and multiple gadgets of various sky-craft (his zeppelin armada and things such as the Death Balloons are super-science creations, but they weren't bought as gadgets). His greatest achievement is the floating sky citadel he calls the Eyrie, a sanctum sanctorum held aloft with the aid of a treasured stash of Chiquibul crystals.

### The Sun-Disk Made Flesh

Emma Nazir, the child of an Egyptian curator and a British archeologist, preferred her summers in London to her winters in el-Amarna. She had no interest in Egyptology; why did her parents spend all their time digging up the dead? Her ignorance mattered little to Muhammad Hatnofer, who kidnaped the adolescent during a performance of the Circus of the Orient. The Brothers Hatnofer, heretical worshipers of the modern Cult of the Sun-Disk, traveled the world in their circus, kidnaping children who seemed likely vessels for their reincarnated long-dead queen, Nefertiti, or her pharaoh, Akhenaton. After hypnotizing the children and performing ritual preparations, they placed them on an altar deep

within the long-lost golden pyramid of Aton. At high noon, special panels in the structure opened, redirecting solar energy into a concentrated ray that seared through the pyramid's center. Hundreds of children met their fiery deaths under this beam. Young Emma Nazir survived — clearly, she was the long-sought reincarnation!

Emma returned to her parents, apparently none the worse for wear. They do not realize that she frequently sneaks away from her boarding school to make a pilgrimage to the hidden pyramid. During such times, she is no longer Emma Nazir. Rather, she believes herself the reincarnated Queen of Egypt, devoted to bringing the worship of Aton to Khem once more. The depravations of the Brothers Hatnofer continue — the Circus of the Orient may have found its Nefertiti, but it has yet to find its Akhenaton. Only then may the ancient ritual be completed, with the divine couple using the hidden pyramid to become gods on Earth.

### The Cult of the Sun-Disk

Near the end of the 18th dynasty, the Pharaoh Akhenaton and his wife Nefertiti broke with the Egyptian pantheon. They elevated Aton, the sun-disk, to the pinnacle of divinity. They built a pyramid to dwarf the majesty of all such structures — a pyramid of gold, devoted to Aton, a pyramid so great that it would bring the royal couple immortality in *this* world rather than the next.

As the story goes, the Egyptian gods were offended by this attempt to elevate the abstract Aton above them. The enraged deities buried the golden pyramid in the sands and cursed the land. After the deaths of Akhenaton and Nefertiti, subsequent rulers rewrote the royal couple's heretical theology and forbade the Cult of the Sun-Disk from gathering. In further effort to avoid angering the gods, all future pharaohs were buried in the Valley of the Kings rather than the pyramids.

Yet, rumors persist that the Cult lives on. Even more, that it has recently rediscovered the lost Pyramid of Aton....

**Traits:** Emma Nazir survived the sun-disk's beam only because she is a stalwart. Thanks to the Brothers Hatnofer's hypnotic rituals, she has no idea that she's become the mad child-queen who terrorizes northern Egypt while the Brothers Hatnofer — when they aren't reinforcing her hypnotic conditioning — scour the world



for their reincarnated king. As Emma, she is a normal, healthy girl who couldn't give a damn about dead Egyptians. While she is Nefertiti, she becomes a zealous tyrant with the Body of Bronze, Superhuman Reflexes and Threat Awareness Knacks and the dynamic equivalent of the Flame Conjunction and Inspirational Aura psychic Knacks. Emma's alter ego also has high levels of Followers, Backing (Cult of the Sun-Disk) and Resources. Enigma reflects Emma's split personality. The hidden pyramid is her sanctum sanctorum, a veritable battery for telluric energies. (It is also configured to emit a beam of such pure light upon the altar that it means instant death to anyone without Body of Bronze.)

## The Intrepid Investigator

She's visited the sunken city of Atlantis. She's been cliff diving with the King of Norway. She was one of the Turk's unwitting assassins, and she has had tea with the Ubiquitous Dragon on several occasions. She regularly quotes the President as "a high-ranking administration official." Sarah Gettel has chronicled the most bizarre and extraordinary events of her bizarre and extraordinary time, often becoming part of the story herself! When Doctor Zorbo invaded New York, she parachuted from a plane and talked him into a brief interview, shouting over cannon fire all the while. She has reliable sources as far afield as Bangladesh and even has dinner once a month with a self-described "Martian." At least half of the Aeon Society is hopelessly in love with her, Whitley Styles chief among them. With only an hour to go before a deadline, she can get the headline of the year with a flirtatious phone call.

If this incredible individual has flaw, it is that she obsessively seeks out the scoop. For her, the story is paramount, and she'll do almost anything to get it, often with a zeal that places her companions in danger. Indeed, it is sometimes unclear which side she's on. The answer is neither: It's the story that she champions. Max Mercer often disagrees with her methods, but he can't argue with her results. If one can overlook Sarah Gettel's frenetic obsession, she is a valuable contact for any Inspired individual who's willing to become another of her informants. If she doesn't know the "real story" herself, she knows someone who does.

**Traits:** Truly the definition of a daredevil, Sarah Gettel has a couple of Background enhancements — Kingpin and Renown — but no Knacks.

## Mooks and Monsters

We got your cops, your hooligans and your dinosaurs right here.

This section provides handy write-ups of various character types adventurers are sure to run into. The Traits

below are merely guidelines; the Storyteller is encouraged to play around with the listings to create variations especially suitable for her series. Instead of nondescript goons, for example, the Dragon might have a legion of warrior-monks to serve him. Just modify the "thug" template to accommodate a higher Dexterity, a talent with swords and an ignorance of firearms. Likewise, if the characters are in for an extended stay on Dinosaur Island, it might be worthwhile to create different Traits for the tyrannosaurus rex, the stegosaurus and so on.

## Extras

It's common in the pulp genre for the fearless adventurers to mop the floor with at least twice their number in goons. Yet, throwing a dozen thugs at the characters can slow things down quite a bit. The Storyteller must make attack rolls for each extra, and an Inspired character isn't guaranteed to fell the extra he fights with one blow. Not to mention that even the most valiant stalwart could get creamed by a mob of wrench-wielding maniacs!

**Adventure** uses secondary characters called "extras" to let the Storyteller throw large numbers of opponents at the heroes of the story without worrying too much about overwhelming them. Extras are pared-down Storyteller characters, thugs clearly no match for any adventurer. Extras are diversions, usually acting under the direction of more powerful agencies. These secondary characters are a plot device and shouldn't interfere with the main story. After taking a few lumps, extras retreat, surrender or fall over to make way for the *real* action.

Extras operate under a few special rules designed to give adventurers a great opportunity to show their heroism and sheer damn toughness. These rules apply to all extras, whether drunk dockworkers, fanatic assassins or rabid hyenas. They're meant to make fights cinematic, yet balanced and streamlined.

- **Hit-or-Miss:** The Storyteller rolls a single die for each extra's attack. As a result, it's relatively easy for a character to dodge, parry or otherwise avoid an extra's attack.

- **Lightweight:** An extra has only three health levels: Hurt -1, Wounded -2 and Maimed -3. Since the dice penalty from injury would make an extra unable to attack after getting hit the first time (see Hit-or-Miss above), an extra ignores the penalty — but *only* for his attack rolls! The injury penalty applies as normal to all of the extra's other actions.

- **Take That!** If a player scores three or more extra successes on an attack roll against an extra, he does not roll damage. Instead, the target is immediately struck down in spectacular fashion! The type of attack dictates whether the mook is unconscious (bashing) or dead (lethal).



## Roleplaying Extras

Infrequently, a lesser character can evolve into a key figure, but most of the time, extras are little more than set dressing. Chapter Seven: Roleplaying goes into the uses secondary characters serve in roleplaying, while the section below provides simple write-ups of different kinds of extras the Storyteller may use.

## Organized Crime

Those seeking to change tomorrow sometimes run afoul of those elements who profit from the imperfect today. The Mob, Asian triads, drug cartels and penny-ante illegal operations all organize their efforts to keep the money rolling in with the authorities none the wiser. Though the specifics vary, each organization has use for disposable toughs and captains to keep the riff raff in line so that the Big Guy at the top can worry about more important things.

### Thugs, Palookas, Heavies, Goons and Other Riff Raff

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3  
**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 1  
**Social:** Appearance 2, Manipulation 1, Charisma 2  
**Abilities:** Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Might 1, Savvy 2, Stealth 1  
**Backgrounds:** Backing 1, Reputation 1  
**Knacks:** None  
**Willpower:** 3  
**Inspiration:** None  
**Equipment:** Clothing and weaponry appropriate to the thug's culture and class, a few bills and assorted change, humorless expression

### Captain

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3  
**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3  
**Social:** Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 2  
**Abilities:** Command 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Savvy 3, Style 2  
**Backgrounds:** Backing 3, Contacts 3, Followers 3, Reputation 3, Resources 3  
**Knacks:** None  
**Willpower:** 5  
**Inspiration:** None  
**Equipment:** Tailored clothing, weaponry appropriate to the thug's culture and class, some nice (if gaudy) jewelry, wrist-watch, etc., plenty of cash for bribes and the like

### Crime Boss

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4  
**Social:** Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4  
**Abilities:** Command 4 (Goons), Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4 (Threats), Interrogation 3, Savvy 4 (Organized Crime), Style 4

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Backing 5, Contacts 4, Followers 5, Reputation 4, Resources 4, Sanctum 1

**Knacks:** None or any one heroic Knack

**Willpower:** 7

**Inspiration:** None or 2

**Equipment:** Tailored clothing, weaponry appropriate to the thug's culture and class, plenty of accoutrements that designate the guy as a top dog on the criminal pile

## The Police

To serve and protect — for the most part, anyway. Adventurers' activities usually involve the police sooner or later, whether dealing with an honest detective or a beat cop on the take. Although these statistics are best suited to local police, they can also serve for FBI agents or other law-enforcement personnel.

### Beat Cop

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3  
**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2  
**Social:** Appearance 2, Manipulation 1, Charisma 2  
**Abilities:** Brawl 2, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Interrogation 2, Investigation 2, Rapport 1  
**Backgrounds:** Backing 1, Contacts 1  
**Knacks:** None  
**Willpower:** 4  
**Inspiration:** None  
**Equipment:** Uniform, billy club, service revolver, note pad and pencil

### Detective

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3  
**Social:** Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 2  
**Abilities:** Brawl 1, Command 1, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Interrogation 3, Investigation 3, Rapport 3, Savvy 3  
**Backgrounds:** Backing 3, Contacts 3  
**Knacks:** None  
**Willpower:** 6  
**Inspiration:** None  
**Equipment:** Suit (slightly threadbare), battered fedora, service revolver, backup piece, cynical attitude.

### Commissioner

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3  
**Social:** Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3  
**Abilities:** Command 3, Firearms 3, Interrogation 2, Investigation 4 (Crimes), Rapport 2, Savvy 4  
**Backgrounds:** Allies 2, Backing 5, Contacts 2  
**Knacks:** None  
**Willpower:** 7  
**Inspiration:** None  
**Equipment:** Spectacles, suit, mahogany desk, service revolver, ulcer



## Miscellany

We would be remiss if we neglected to mention these pulp staples. The Storyteller should extrapolate from these listings as the story calls for it.

### Aboriginal or Neanderthal

Though not as industrially or scientifically advanced as the rest of the world, it is the foolish adventurer who assumes this also means these people are stupid.

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Social:** Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

**Abilities:** Animal Handling 2, Archery 1, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Survival 4

**Backgrounds:** None

**Knacks:** None

**Willpower:** 3

**Inspiration:** None

**Equipment:** Simple tools and weapons, woven or hide carrying bags

### Cultist

A catch-all category of any appropriately zealous person, from a KKK member to a Thuggee assassin.

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 1

**Social:** Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 2

**Abilities:** Brawl 2, Disguise 1, Resistance 1, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 2

**Backgrounds:** Backing 1

**Knacks:** None

**Willpower:** 3

**Inspiration:** None

**Equipment:** Robe, maniacal gleam in the eye

### Ninja

Silent and deadly, ninjas are often seem less powerful when more of them appear at one time.

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Social:** Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

**Abilities:** Archery 3, Athletics 4, Intimidation 3, Martial Arts 4, Melee 3, Resistance 3, Stealth 3

**Backgrounds:** Backing 1

**Knacks:** None

**Willpower:** 4

**Inspiration:** None

**Equipment:** Katana, dagger, throwing stars, blinding powder, other nifty tricks

## Telluric Weirdness

In the wake of Hammersmith's disaster, the flood of Z-waves that washed over the planet created all sorts of unusual phenomena. Monsters from the distant past walk the earth once more, and bizarre mutations domi-

nate certain remote regions. Ape-men, dinosaurs, carnivorous plants and even stranger dangers await those who would venture to these distant locales.

### Ape-man

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Social:** Appearance 3, Manipulation 1, Charisma 1

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Endurance 2, Intimidation 4, Might 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3

**Backgrounds:** None

**Knacks:** None

**Willpower:** 3

**Inspiration:** None

### Carnivorous Plant

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 0, Wits 1

**Social:** Appearance 3, Manipulation 0, Charisma 0

**Abilities:** Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Might 1, Stealth 2

**Willpower:** 1

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -2, -3, -4

**Attack:** If a large animal comes within three meters, the plant's vines can perform a five-dice hold attack. Once a victim is successfully held, the plant chomps on its victim with a four-dice bashing damage effect until the victim escapes the hold. Larger plants have a longer reach and can hold multiple victims. A "standard" carnivorous plant can move its vines but has no actual locomotive ability.

### Dinosaur

**Physical:** Strength 8, Dexterity 2, Stamina 7

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Social:** Appearance 5, Manipulation 1, Charisma 1

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 2, Endurance 5, Intimidation 4, Might 5, Resistance 5, Survival 3

**Willpower:** 4

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -3, -3, -3, -4, -4, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Claw: 5 L, Bite: 7 L, Trample: 9 B

### Zombie

Sometimes, "zombies" are actually drugged people; other times, they are corpses sustained briefly by telluric energy.

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 1, Stamina 5

**Mental:** Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Social:** Appearance 4, Manipulation 1, Charisma 1

**Abilities:** Brawl 1, Endurance 4, Intimidation 3 (Freakish), Might 3, Resistance 4

**Backgrounds:** None

**Knacks:** None

**Willpower:** 0

**Inspiration:** None

**Note:** A zombie suffers no wound penalties.



### Mad Science

Proof that even Inspiration can be misguided, some inventors create horrible constructs in the search for an better world. Hephaestia Geary-Wexler's collectors — treaded monstrosities that behave according to a limited robotic intelligence — are one example of devices that have dubious value in early 20th century society. Other inventors build devices of even less tenuous social value — such as giant robots that can punch through bank vaults or stomp adventurers into a fine red paste.

#### Collector

Each "metachine" is programmed to detect criminal activity and rake the perpetrator into a retaining cell inside its fortified chassis. Though the collector's purpose is to fight crime, its simplistic sense of justice (and the possibility of reprogramming) could endanger the rule of law.

**Physical:** Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Social:** Appearance 4, Manipulation 0, Charisma 0

**Abilities:** Academics 1 (Law), Brawl 1, Might 1

**Backgrounds:** None

**Knacks:** None

**Willpower:** 1

**Inspiration:** None

**Note:** The collector's metal casing gives it 4 [3] armor in addition to its soak. It is immune to mental and poison attacks. It can perform a six-dice holding attack against everyone within reach. If it succeeds against the same victim on two consecutive turns, the victim is raked into the retaining cell. Escaping is an extended Might action: 15 successes to punch through the wall or nine successes to pry open the door. Once free, the subject may well have to avoid capture in the collector's arms once again.

#### Giant Robot, Automaton, Mechanical Man

A robot is typically at least two meters tall and very imposing. Generally, a robot has five dots' worth of Abilities beyond those listed below, signifying tasks in which it has been programmed.

**Physical:** Strength 9, Dexterity 1, Stamina 5

**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Social:** Appearance 4, Manipulation 1, Charisma 1

**Abilities:** Brawl 1, Intimidation 2, Might 5

**Backgrounds:** None

**Knacks:** None

**Willpower:** 1

**Inspiration:** None

**Note:** A robot has 5 [3] armor in addition to its soak. It is immune to mental and poison attacks.

### Animals

A storied life invariably includes stampedes of elephants and an attack by a rabid dog or two. Whether on a trip to the zoo or a trek through darkest Africa, statistics on a selection of creatures may come in handy. Note the lack of Social or Mental Attributes — a lion's Manipulation depends mostly on its roar, and a bat's Charisma usually doesn't apply significantly to dice rolling. The Traits listed here serve for a variety of animals — in game terms, a lion isn't so different from a tiger, while a hawk's Traits also work for a falcon or eagle, and so on. (Assume Strength is already added into the damage effects listed below.)

#### Alligator

**Strength** 4, **Dexterity** 2, **Stamina** 4

**Abilities:** Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 2

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -3, -4, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Bite: 6 L, Tail Slap: 7 B

#### Bat

**Strength** 1, **Dexterity** 3, **Stamina** 1

**Abilities:** Awareness 4, Stealth 2

**Willpower:** 2

**Health Levels:** OK, -2

**Attack:** Bite: 1 L

#### Bear

**Strength** 5, **Dexterity** 2, **Stamina** 5

**Abilities:** Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Endurance 2, Might 2

**Willpower:** 4

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -3, -4, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Bite: 4 L, Claw: 6 L, Hug: 8 B

#### Elephant

**Strength** 6, **Dexterity** 1, **Stamina** 7

**Abilities:** Brawl 1, Endurance 3, Might 4, Resistance 2

**Willpower:** 4

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -3, -3, -4, -4, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Trample: 10 B, Trunk Sweep: 8 B

#### Hawk

**Strength** 2, **Dexterity** 3, **Stamina** 3

**Abilities:** Awareness 5

**Willpower:** 3

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -3, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Bite: 1 L, Claw: 2 L, Swooping Strike: 3 L



## Horse

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

**Abilities:** Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Endurance 2

**Willpower:** 3

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -3, -4, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Bite: 2 L, Kick: 7 B, Trample: 6 B

## Lion

Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Abilities:** Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 5

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -3, -4, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Bite: 4 L, Claw: 3 L

## Rat

Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Abilities:** Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2

**Willpower:** 1

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -4

**Attack:** Bite: 1 L (swarm attacks inflict 3 L per turn)

## Wolf

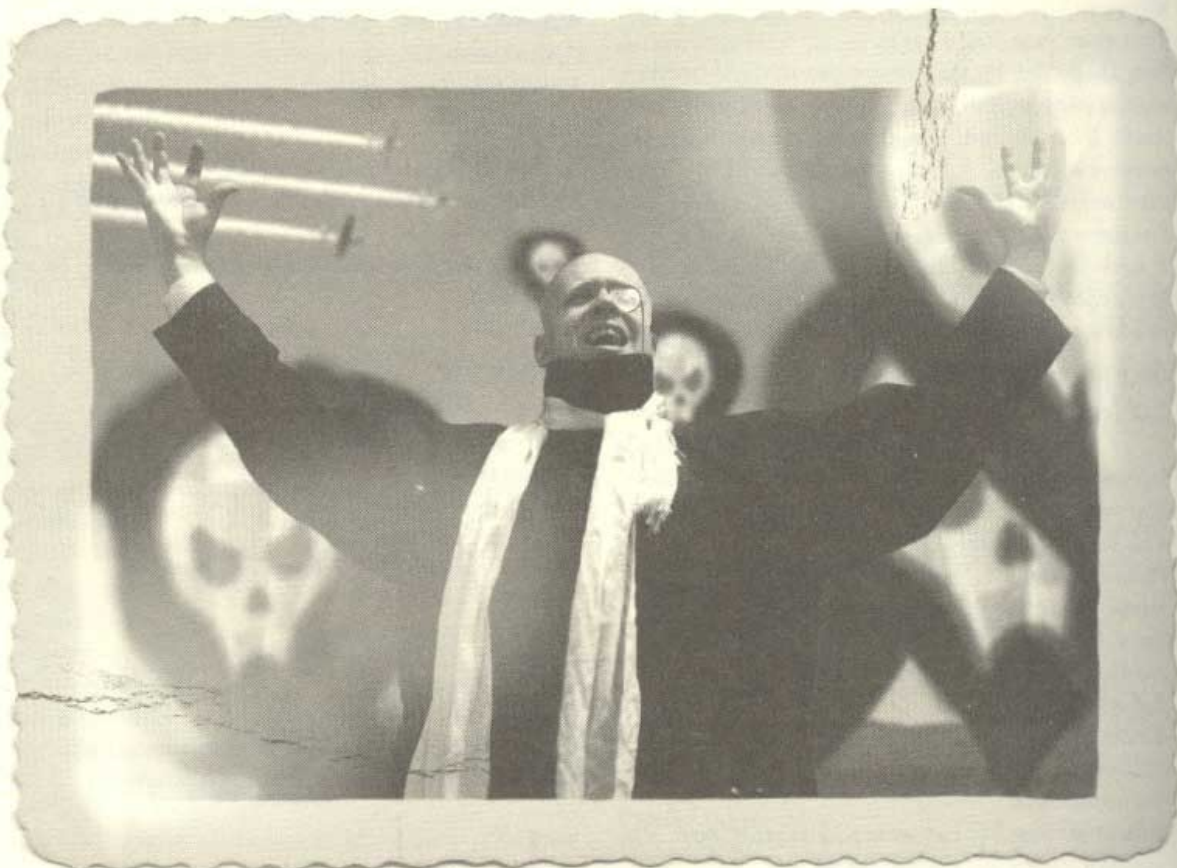
Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 5

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -4, Incapacitated

**Attack:** Bite: 4 L; Claw: 2 L



***"Menschheit! Zum Himmel!"***



# APPENDIX

This chapter covers “everything else” — all the pieces that didn’t quite find a home elsewhere in the book. Here are statistics for 1920s weapons and equipment, a few comments on fashions of the ’20s, fiendish drugs, a timeline and other odds and ends.

## Information On Tap

This book can’t possibly tell you everything you’d like to know about the ’20s through ’40s. Fortunately, it doesn’t have to. There’s a wealth of information out there in the world at large about how things were.

See the bibliography, toward the end of this appendix, for specific recommendations. You can also search the Internet and consult your local library for a lot more leads. Historical documentary series provide a wealth of minor details, any one of which can become an adventure seed in the right circumstances.

## Money and Resources

The appendix lists all sorts of things an adventurer can buy. So how do you pay for it? One of two ways: money or Resources. Items are listed with a cost rating that translates to a monetary range the Storyteller can nail down as she sees fit. The chart below gives a quick reference of the cost range. Your character can buy the item as long as he has enough money on hand.

| Item Cost | Price Range         |
|-----------|---------------------|
| •         | \$1 — \$10          |
| ••        | \$11 — \$75         |
| •••       | \$76 — \$250        |
| ••••      | \$251 — \$3,000     |
| •••••     | \$3,001 — \$10,000  |
| •••••+    | +\$25,000 per point |

To buy something using Resources, compare your character’s Resources score to the item’s cost rating. If your Resources exceeds an item’s cost, you have enough money to buy it outright. If Resources equals the cost, roll Resources; a single success buys the item, otherwise, you don’t have the cash right then. If your Resources score is lower than an item’s cost, you must get a number of successes on the Resources roll equal to the difference. So, if an item costs three points higher than your Resources, you must get three successes to buy it.

You can try buying an item equal to your Resources once per day. You can try buying an item more expensive than your Resources once a week. If you succeed in buying the item in either case, your character can’t try to purchase anything else that day with a cost equal to or greater than his Resources.

## The Tools of Adventure

### Implements of Destruction: Weapons

Heroes and villains don’t just assault each other bare-handed in pugilistic displays or competitions of baritsu. The implements described here are some common generic weapons. Each general weapon type is listed separately, along with a few representative examples when appropriate.

#### Melee Weapons

When a fist isn’t enough, an adventurer can often find a knife, ax handle, or other handy implement to create the appropriate amount of mayhem.

- **Ax:** The typical modern-day ax chops firewood. Using it in combat requires some room to the side or overhead for a good swing, but a reinforced steel blade attached to a meter-long handle can dish out a lot of damage.

- **Chain:** It takes practice to use a chain without hurting oneself more than the target (the Storyteller may assign +1 difficulty for a character’s first few attempts at chain attacks). In skilled hands, chains are suitable for stunts such as whipping around corners. Also, the wielder can entangle the target rather than inflict damage; each success on the damage roll becomes the equivalent of a level of Strength clinching the target (see p. 203).

- **Club:** Anything blunt can serve as a club, from billy clubs to bottles.

- **Knife:** A knife is any edged weapon less than 50 centimeters long, for **Adventure** purposes.

- **Spear:** A stabbing weapon made of a two meter long wooden pole topped with a pointed blade made of stone, bone or metal.

- **Staff:** A length of wood or, occasionally, metal, a staff functions much like a club but provides longer reach and can even be used for stunts such as vaulting.

- **Sword:** Most civilized societies of the 1920s frown on public displays of swords, but the sword cane is a staple of pulp adventure. In less civilized areas — by Western standards, anyway — swordplay remains common.

- **Whip:** A long, limber weapon typically made of leather, the whip a favorite of the pulp genre. In game terms, a whip has the same special characteristics as a chain, above.



## Melee Weapons Table

| Type       | Damage    | Str Min | Conceal | Mass | Cost |
|------------|-----------|---------|---------|------|------|
| Ax         | Str + 4 L | 2       | N       | 3    | •    |
| Chain      | Str + 5 B | 1       | P       | 2.5  | •    |
| Club       | Str + 4 B | 1       | T       | 1+   | •    |
| Knife      | Str + 2 L | 1       | J       | 0.5  | •    |
| Staff      | Str + 6 B | 2       | N       | 3    | ••   |
| Spear      | Str + 4 L | 2       | N       | 3    | ••   |
| Sword      | Str + 5 L | 3       | T       | 3    | ••   |
| Sword cane | Str + 4 L | 2       | T       | 3    | ••   |
| Whip       | Str + 2 L | 2       | J       | 2    | •    |

**Damage:** The weapon's damage effect dice pool; B = bashing damage, L = lethal damage. As indicated, all melee weapons add the user's Strength Attribute rating unless otherwise specified.

**Str Min:** The Strength Attribute required to use the weapon effectively. Also applies as the weapon's default armor rating against structural damage.

**Conceal:** P = Can be carried in a pocket; J = Can be hidden under a jacket; T = Can be hidden under a trenchcoat; N = Cannot be concealed on a person.

**Mass:** Mass in kilograms. This is also the number of structural levels the weapon has (round fractions down, to a minimum of 1). A weapon suffers +1 difficulty to its use for every structural level it loses; once it reaches zero, the weapon is rendered useless.

**Cost:** Resources rating required to buy the weapon.





## Ranged Weapons

Guns can certainly kill, but this isn't the modern age, replete with high-power ammunition; there are tales of gangsters and cops taking a frightening number of gunshot wounds and still surviving. Most handguns used low-powered .38 or 9mm Parabellum ammo.

• **Revolver:** A typical modern handgun. Light revolvers: Colt New Line Pocket Model .22, Smith & Wesson Safety Hammerless .38. Heavy revolvers: Colt M1873 "Peacemaker" .45, Smith & Wesson Frontier .44-40, Webley Mk I .455.

• **Automatic:** A clip-loaded handgun, more costly than a revolver but increasingly popular on both sides of the law. Light automatics: Luger P08 9mm, Mauser c/96 "Broomhandle" 9mm, Walther Model PP 7.65mm. Heavy automatics (there were few "heavy" calibers until the .45 ACP cartridge proved itself, and most were Colt knock-offs): Colt M1911 .45.

• **Rifle:** A typical long-range weapon, used in hunting and warfare. Most hunting rifles are knock-offs of older military designs or are simply military surplus. The notable exceptions are single-shot big game rifles such as elephant and buffalo guns. The WWII era sees a proliferation of semi-automatic rifles and a greater distinction between "hunting" and "military" rifles. Springfield M1903 .30-06 5-shot bolt-action, Winchester 1873 .44-40 17-shot lever-action, Lee-Enfield Mk III .303 10-shot bolt-action, M1 Garand .30-06 8-round magazine.

• **Submachinegun, light machine gun:** A portable weapon capable of firing a great many bullets in rapid succession. Submachinegun: MP38 "Schmeisser" 9mm 32-round magazine, M1 Thompson .45 20-round magazine or 50-round drum. Light Machine Gun: Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) M1918 .30-30 20-round magazine, MG34 7.92mm belt-fed.

### Ranged Weapons Table

| Type            | Acc | Damage      | Str Min | Range | Mnv                | RoF | Clip     | Conc   | Mass   | Cost   |
|-----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------|--------------------|-----|----------|--------|--------|--------|
| Revolver, Lt    | 0   | 3L          | 1       | 50    | Ms, Tw             | 2   | 5        | P      | 0.5    | •      |
| Revolver, Hvy   | 0   | 4L          | 2       | 50    | Ms, Tw             | 2   | 6        | J      | 0.5    | ••     |
| Automatic, Lt   | 0   | 3L          | 1       | 50    | AF, Ms, Tw         | 4   | 7+1      | P      | 0.5    | ••     |
| Automatic, Hvy  | 0   | 4L          | 2       | 50    | AF, Ms, Tw         | 3   | 7+1      | J      | 0.5    | •••    |
| Rifle           | +2  | 7L          | 2       | 200   | n/a                | 1   | 5+1      | N      | 3      | ••     |
| Submachinegun   | 0   | 5L          | 2       | 50    | AF, Ms, Sa, St, Tw | 20  | 20       | T      | 2.5    | •••    |
| Machine gun, Lt | 0   | 6L          | 3       | 50    | AF, Ms, Sa, St     | 45  | 50       | N      | 3      | •••    |
| Shotgun         | +5  | 6L          | 2       | 30    | Ms                 | 2   | 2 to 8+1 | T      | 3      | ••     |
| Thrown object   | 0   | Str +/- 1-3 | 1       | Spec. | n/a                | n/a | Spec.    | varies | varies | varies |
| Bow             | +1  | 3L          | 2       | 30    | n/a                | 1   | varies   | N      | 3      | ••     |

**Acc:** Dice added to the shooter's dice pool for the weapon's innate accuracy.

**Damage:** The weapon's damage effect dice pool. Ranged weapons inflict lethal damage unless otherwise indicated.

**Str Min:** The Strength Attribute required to use the weapon effectively. Also applies as the weapon's default armor rating against structural damage.

**Range:** The weapon's practical range in meters.

**Mnv:** Available special attack maneuvers. AF = Automatic fire, Ms = Multiple shots, Sa = Semi-automatic burst, St = Strafing, Tw = Two weapons. (See p. 204 for maneuver explanations.)

**RoF:** Rate of fire, in shots per turn of combat.

**Clip:** The number of shots the weapon holds. Specific models may vary somewhat in actual capacity.

**Conc:** Concealability. P = Can be carried in a pocket; J = Can be hidden under a jacket; T = Can be hidden under a trenchcoat; N = Cannot be concealed on a person at all.

**Mass:** Mass in kilograms. This is also the number of structural levels the weapon has (round fractions down, to a minimum of 1). A weapon suffers +1 difficulty to its use for every structural level it loses; once it reaches zero, the weapon is rendered useless.

**Cost:** Resources rating required to buy the weapon.

The details of thrown objects' combat ability depends on what's being thrown. Small objects seldom do more than Str dice of damage. Pointed objects do a die or two more damage than something equally massive but blunt. Actual weapons do one or more dice damage more than the equivalent improvised object.



• **Shotgun:** A longarm firing sprays of pellets, with limited range but a lot of power close up. This was the hey-day of everything from double-barreled 10-gauges to "trench guns," 12-gauge semi-automatic shotguns with extended 8-round magazines. Browning Auto-5 12-gauge 4-round magazine, Winchester M1887 10-gauge 5-round lever-action, Winchester M1912 12-gauge 5-round pump-action.

• **Thrown object:** Anything that comes to hand that an attacker can lift and heave at a target. See the throwing rules on page 190 for range restrictions.

## Heavy Weaponry

Sometimes it's necessary or desirable to inflict more damage than mere hand-held weapons allow. These weapons are mostly used in military situations, and local authorities may not approve of "the ceaseless war against crime" and the like as suitable causes.

• **Heavy machine gun:** A selection of typically vehicle-mounted, belt-fed machine guns emerged during the Great War, based on the design put forth by Hiram Maxim. Examples: Lewis Aircraft MG .30 M1918 50-round drum, Maxim Automatic MG .303 50-round maga-

zine, Vickers MG .30 50-round magazine.

• **75 mm gun:** Typical tank armament.

• **Artillery:** Field pieces such as howitzers.

• **Flamethrower:** A backpack tank of napalm and a rifle-like nozzle for focusing the spray. Napalm continues to burn after it's sprayed, halving its damage dice pool every turn. It is extremely difficult to extinguish until it burns itself out.

• **Grenade launcher:** A rifle-like device capable of firing grenades much further than the human arm can throw them. Damage depends on grenade type, listed after heavy weapons.

• **Mortar:** A portable, indirect-fire weapon carried by most armies. It usually fires fragmentation or armor-piercing shells, but it can also launch gas and smoke shells.

## Grenades

These are portable explosives, designed to hit something and release whatever's inside. Specific effects vary widely, depending on contents. The grenades listed here can all be thrown, set on a simple timer or fired from a grenade launcher or mortar.

Heavy Weapons Table

| Type             | Acc | Damage    | Str Min | Range | RoF | Capacity | Mass  | Cost |
|------------------|-----|-----------|---------|-------|-----|----------|-------|------|
| Machine gun, Hvy | 0   | 6 [4] L   | 4       | 500   | 21  | 100      | 75    | ••   |
| 75mm gun         | +2  | 12 [8] L  | n/a     | 1000  | 1   | 1        | 80    | •••  |
| Artillery        | -2  | 15 [10] L | n/a     | 10 km | 1   | 1        | 3,000 | •••• |
| Flamethrower     | +3  | 8 L/turn  | 3       | 10    | 1   | 30       | 100   | ••   |
| Grenade launcher | -2  | varies    | 3       | 250   | 1   | 1        | 15    | ••   |
| Mortar           | -2  | 8 [6] L   | 3       | 1,000 | 1   | 1        | 150   | ••   |

**Acc:** Dice added to the attacker's dice pool due to the weapon's innate accuracy.

**Damage:** The weapon's damage effect dice pool. Heavy weapons inflict lethal damage unless otherwise indicated. Bracketed numbers are damage adds, automatic levels of damage inflicted on targets that lack armor adds. See page 206 for more details on damage adds and armor adds.

**Str Min:** The minimum Strength Attribute required to use the weapon effectively if the character tries holding the weapon himself. Also applies as the weapon's default armor rating against structural damage. An "n/a" means the thing is just too damn heavy to lift; assume an armor rating of 2 [3].

**Range:** Practical maximum range in meters.

**RoF:** Rate of fire in shots per turn.

**Capacity:** Number of shots the weapon holds.

**Mass:** Mass in kilograms. Divide this rating by 10 to determine the number of structural levels the weapon has (round fractions down). These weapons suffer +1 difficulty to their use for every two structural levels they lose; once this reaches zero, the weapon is rendered useless.

**Cost:** All heavy weapons are "restricted," available only to personnel with the proper training and certification (typically a member of the military). A character can "check out" a weapon if he has a Backing rating one point higher than the weapon's listed cost. He must return the weapon after completing the specified mission; refusing to do so results in disciplinary action or worse. A character can purchase the weapon in question only if his Resources rating is one point higher than the listed cost, and the player must also make a Resources roll at +2 difficulty.



### Grenade Table

| Type             | Damage  | Notes   |
|------------------|---------|---|
| Fragmentation    | 7 L     | Full damage to all targets within three meters, half damage to targets within six meters. |
| Shaped charge    | 8 [6] L | No blast effect.  |
| Tear gas         | 3 B     | See tear gas, page 257.   |
| Concussive       | 5 B     | Full damage to all targets within three meters, half damage to targets within six meters. |
| Flash            | 3       | No damage; instead, roll indicates number of turns target is blinded.                     |
| White phosphorus | 7 L     | Continuous damage, halved every turn after the first.                                     |

**Damage:** The weapon's damage effect dice pool for each target affected unless otherwise indicated; B = bashing damage, L = lethal damage.

## Armor

Due to the level of technology in the early 20th century, armor is bulky and obvious to bystanders. Not surprisingly, armor attracts attention except on the battlefield (and maybe even then, depending on the circumstances).

• **Helmet:** A headpiece made of thin metal plate or reinforced leather meant to protect the wearer's tender noggin.

• **Reinforced clothing:** This is the exception to the "bulky and obvious" generalization, covering all ingenious use of protective fibers such as leather, concealed thin armor sheets and the like. Tailoring the outfit adds substantially to the cost, depending on how stylish the wearer wants to appear.

• **Flak jacket:** Military gear intended to protect the wearer from explosives.

• **Riot gear:** Favored by the police and private armies dealing with rioters, mutineers, dissidents and the like.

## Dynamic Propulsion: Vehicles

Most of the time, transportation, from cars to camels, exists to get the characters from one locale to the next. Measure off time and distance, and there the characters are, ready for the next dramatic moment. Sometimes, the journey itself is the adventure, and sometimes, the vehicle plays an important part once the characters get to where they're going.

• **Horses:** Horses still carry riders in saddles and pull wagons in rural areas, even in the most advanced countries, and in colonial or undeveloped nations, they're just as common in cities. (In some parts of the world, other animals fill these roles: mules, camels, elephants,

### Armor Table

| Type                | Bashing | Lethal | Covers      | Penalty | Cost |
|---------------------|---------|--------|-------------|---------|------|
| Helmet              | 1       | 1      | Head        | 0       | •    |
| Reinforced clothing | 0       | 2      | Body        | 0       | ••   |
| Flak jacket         | 4       | 4      | Torso, arms | 1       | •••  |
| Riot gear           | 5       | 5      | Body        | 2       | •••• |

**Bashing:** Soak against bashing damage.

**Lethal:** Soak against lethal damage.

**Covers:** What parts of the wearer are protected. "Body" refers to everything but the head.

**Penalty:** Difficulty penalty applied to Dexterity-related dice pools due to the armor's bulk.

**Cost:** Resources rating required to buy the armor.

If a single attack inflicts at least twice the armor's rating in damage successes, the armor is destroyed.



etc. Exotic beasts of burden make for great local color and even handy fodder for stunts.)

• **Motorcycles:** Motorcycles are fit only for the daring, and ones with expense accounts at that. Many motorcycles are unreliable and costly, though certain models such as the Indian Scout have proven surprisingly robust. Some big cities have couriers who use them, but their use is as much about showing off as it is a matter of practicality.

• **Automobiles:** By early 21st century standards, cars are bulky, awkward and inefficient. By the Adventure Era's standards, they're sleek, sophisticated machines, getting better all the time. The cars of 20 years ago are old news, fit only for use by tinkering kids and hicks who don't know anything about style. A basic sedan is an expensive proposition, and the limousines favored by corporate presidents and gangsters much more so.

• **Trucks:** Wherever train lines don't go, trucks carry cargo. They're seldom stylish, but they get the job done. More than one enterprising adventurer has found that a great deal of equipment that would otherwise be bolted down in a basement hideout works just fine in a properly reinforced truck.

• **Trains:** Trains are the commercial backbone of the Adventure world. They link interior cities and ports in every continent. Both passenger and commercial lines are (generally) reliable and affordable. Most people needing to get from one city to another overland automatically look at train timetables first; anything else is unusual. Within most cities, streetcar, trolley and subway lines run through every major neighborhood and often well out into surrounding suburbs and small towns.

### Vehicle Table

The numbers given here cover the vehicle's physical performance. Keep in mind that the numbers don't tell the whole story: the vehicle's style (and the style of the driver) matters, too. A flashy bit of driving can give an Intimidation bonus, for instance.

| Vehicle             | Safe Speed | Max Speed | Maneuver | Passengers | Armor   | Cost   |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|----------|------------|---------|--------|
| Horse               | 20         | 50        | 6        | 2          | 0       | •      |
| Older automobile    | 50         | 100       | 4        | 4          | 1       | ••     |
| Recent automobile   | 60         | 120       | 5        | 4          | 2       | •••    |
| Motorcycle          | 50         | 120       | 6        | 1          | 0       | •••    |
| Small truck         | 50         | 100       | 4        | 2          | 3       | •••    |
| Large truck         | 60         | 120       | 4        | 2          | 4       | ••••   |
| Tramp steamer       | 10         | 30        | 3        | 20         | 5 [10]  | •••••  |
| Typical cargo ship  | 25         | 40        | 5        | 20         | 8 [10]  | •••••  |
| Luxury liner        | 25         | 50        | 5        | 400        | 10 [12] | •••••• |
| Small dirigible     | 50         | 100       | 5        | 50         | 4 [6]   | ••••   |
| Large dirigible     | 60         | 140       | 6        | 500-1000   | 5 [6]   | •••••• |
| Small blimp         | 30         | 60        | 5        | 10         | 2       | ••••   |
| Large blimp         | 50         | 80        | 5        | 100        | 2       | ••••   |
| Passenger aeroplane | 200        | 280       | 5        | 20         | 3 [8]   | ••••   |
| Cargo aeroplane     | 160        | 280       | 5        | 4          | 4 [8]   | ••••   |
| Autogyro            | 120        | 250       | 6        | 2          | 3 [8]   | ••••   |

**Safe Speed:** Top speed in kph for handling without penalty.

**Max Speed:** Top speed in kph for handling without the vehicle physically collapsing, exploding or otherwise ceasing to operate.

**Maneuver:** The largest possible dice pool allowed by the vehicle type. Note that weather penalties are halved for dirigibles.

**Passengers:** The vehicle's normal seating capacity. Crowding in extra people reduces Maneuver rating by one per additional person.

**Armor:** The protection the vehicle's body provides to occupants. This soak applies to any damage directed at the interior from outside before any spills through onto passengers. A rating in brackets is an armor add, the minimum number of damage successes a personal weapon needs to penetrate the vehicle's armor. See page 181 for more details on armor adds.

**Cost:** The level of Resources needed to acquire the vehicle.



• **Steamships:** Just as trains tie the land together, steamships bridge the oceans. Thanks to the Panama Canal and other great engineering works, no port on Earth is more than a few weeks from any other for someone prepared to pay the costs in fuel and operating expenses. Tramp steamers and the seedy end of commercial hauling practically form nations unto themselves, while prominent luxury lines are matters of national pride, and navies are practically proof of whether a nation is or is not really a force others must reckon with. Cargo ships have crews twice as large as their passenger capacity or more, while passenger ships have about one crew member for every five to ten passengers.

• **Blimps:** Airships without rigid frames are blimps: They're literally huge gas bags, held together by elaborate systems of ropes and cords. They can't carry as much as dirigibles and aren't as easy to control, but they're cheaper. A few colonial administrations have even experimented with regular cargo service by blimp in jungle or other hazardous terrain, with, at best, very mixed results.

• **Dirigibles:** Lighter-than-air craft with rigid frames, dirigibles — or zeppelins, as they're also known — are the most well-developed form of air travel. Commercially viable passenger lines link cities in southern Germany and its environs, and a few routes also operate within the United States. Less profitable ventures can be found wherever a business or government sponsor wants the prestige and is prepared to pay the bills — nothing is quite as impressive as a gleaming hull, hundreds of meters long, cruising almost silently through the air above an awed population. The daring wealthy include dirigible trips as part of their social whirl, while adventure-minded explorers, scientists and others sometimes base their operations out of well-equipped dirigibles. Dirigibles with passenger service have one crew member for every two to five passengers (this is luxury service).

• **Fixed-Wing Aeroplanes:** Heavier-than-air flight is just a few decades old, and already, it's become part of the spirit of the age. Few people have ever flown in a plane, but many people see barnstormers and mail planes and the like. People in some major ports even see the exotic "flying boats" coming in or going out — wildly impractical, but glamorous in the extreme.

• **Rotary-Wing Aeroplanes:** Aviation history includes lines of development that won't flourish on through the century. One of these is the autogyro, with an unpowered helicopter-like rotor providing lift and a typical front-mounted powered propeller to pull the craft forward. Many pulp heroes favor the autogyro for its flexibility and agility: It can nearly hover, and it requires a few tens of meters for landings and takeoff rather than hundreds of meters, so that it can be stowed in urban hideaways as well as at airports. In addition, there are several rival schools of thought about helicopter design and serious competition to make some rotary-wing scheme competitive in cost against more conventional aeroplanes.

## Customizing Vehicles

Many bands of heroes (and villains) have extensively modified vehicles, which identify them to the world at large and aid them in their various adventurous pursuits. Each of the following modifications requires a successful Engineering roll with one or more successes and raises the Resources cost of the vehicle one level. (There are reasons why adventurers pool their resources for some of these projects.) Each of these options may only be applied once. Any more extreme modifications fall into the realm of super-science (see Chapter Five) or gadgets (see p. 146).

• **Hanging On:** This modification fits the vehicle with everything needed to allow passengers to ride along outside: extra-wide running boards, reinforced side mirrors, extra hand- and footholds and the like. The vehicle continues to carry its normal number of passengers inside, but an equal number may now ride somewhere on the outside.

• **Jumping Off:** This modification usually goes along with Hanging On, but it doesn't have to. The vehicle has features that allow passengers to get on and off quickly and, usually, dramatically: door frames good for bracing against while jumping, ladders to lower from aircraft and so on. The driver (or pilot) makes a Drive (or Pilot) roll, at +1 difficulty when going at half or more of safe speed or +2 when above safe speed, in addition to the usual adjustments for circumstances. Players who want their characters to perform a stunt on or around the vehicle may add half the successes of that Drive (or Pilot) roll, rounded down, to their stunt rolls, as long as the stunt takes place later that turn or on the turn following.

• **Settling In:** The vehicle is equipped for permanent residence. Reduce the passenger total by a third (round up); no new space is gained (as with a super-science Advancement), but the existing room is well appointed. There's a tradition in some secret services of field agents operating out of customized train cars, and some adventurers enjoy the freedom of an airborne or maritime home.

## Vehicle Damage

Each vehicle has seven structural levels, from Scraped to Broken Down, equivalent to characters' health levels. (Demolished for a vehicle means it's only so much melted slag.) Damage reduces a vehicle's structural integrity until it collapses, blows up or otherwise ceases to function. (Animals use health levels; see Chapter Eight for sample creatures.)

| Structural Level | Dice Penalty | Description  |
|------------------|--------------|--|
| Scraped          | 0            | Scored and dented, marring the look but not the performance.             |
| Dented           | -1           | Minor structural damage. Halve the gap between safe speed and max speed. |



|             |    |  |
|-------------|----|--|
| Battered    | -1 | Serious structural damage; max speed is now safe speed.            |
| Smashed     | -2 | Significant damage; halve safe speed.                              |
| Breached    | -3 | Structurally unsound, a death trap waiting to go off.              |
| Wrecked     | -4 | Only basic systems work; max speed is one-tenth normal safe speed. |
| Broken Down |    | The vehicle has no power and can't move.                           |
| Demolished  |    | The vehicle is completely destroyed, possibly in a fiery blast.    |

The dice penalty listed for each level is applied to the operator's Drive or Pilot roll and also applies to Archery, Firearms and Athletics rolls and other efforts to attack from within (or clinging onto) the vehicle. The driver may spend a point of Inspiration to negate the penalties for the rest of the scene, but if the vehicle is Breached or more seriously damaged, it falls apart once it comes to a halt.

## Repairs

Repairing damage takes parts and time. Damage down to Battered can usually be repaired on the spot without needing new materials (lacking proper tools applies a difficulty, at the Storyteller's discretion). Fixing Smashed damage takes access to new parts, and Breached and worse damage requires the mechanic to use the resources of a garage or other repair facility. All repair attempts require an Engineering roll (see p. 190). The time required for repairs depends on the degree of damage, as listed below.

| Structural Level | Repair Time |
|------------------|-------------|
| Scraped          | One hour    |
| Dented           | Three hours |
| Battered         | Six hours   |
| Smashed          | 12 hours    |
| Breached         | One day     |
| Wrecked          | Three days  |
| Broken Down      | One week    |

Superior skill (Engineering 3 Ability or greater) moves the time up one level: three days for Broken Down damage, one hour for Dented and less than half an hour for Scraped. Having Ability mastery in the required Trait moves the time up two levels on the scale, to a minimum of 10-30 minutes. Also, every two successes beyond the one required for repairs to work at all moves the time up one additional level (regardless of the character's skill level).

## Jury-Rigging

Sometimes, you don't have the luxury of spending a day fixing damaged gear or you simply lack the supplies to do the job right. A character may jury-rig a dam-

aged piece of equipment instead of repairing it. This choice is made *before* any repairs are attempted (but may occur after diagnosing the severity of damage). The player rolls the appropriate Trait dice pool (normally Engineering); each success indicates a structural level that the character has somehow taped back together, wired to some kind of functionality or otherwise made to work for the time being. Damaged gear cannot be jury-rigged beyond Dented and functions at the new structural level for the remainder of the scene. Each level of damage it sustains after being jury-rigged counts as two structural levels' worth of damage, however — it doesn't take much to turn the thing into so much scrap, what with it running on spit and baling wire already!

At the end of the scene, the equipment loses whatever integrity the character jury-rigged into it. Bindings snap, wiring burns out, pieces fall off, and so on. It falls to one structural level lower than the one it was reduced to *before* being jury-rigged — the character got it working for a little while, but the added stress ends up causing more damage in the long run! It may undergo normal repairs at that point, unless it fell to Demolished. At that stage, it's only so much scrap.

## The Costs of Travel

Maintaining a vehicle requires yearly expenses at about half the initial Resources cost to purchase (round down to a minimum of 1). In real-world terms, automobile tires cost \$10-15 apiece, replacement headlights \$3-5 and a good wrench set perhaps \$10.

Train fare on almost any scale is Resources 1 fodder. In the US and Europe, trips of less than 100 kilometers seldom cost more than \$5, while going 1,000-5,000 kilometers seldom costs more than \$10-15 dollars. Streetcar, subway and bus fare is generally in the 5-10 cent range — Resources 1 at most.

First class sea passages require Resources 3 (\$200 or more for a round trip), while second class requires Resources 2, and steerage can be had for Resources 1 (\$35 or even less, with increasingly disgusting conditions as the cost falls).

Air fares, when there are air routes available, require Resources 2 for flights up to 250 kilometers and Resources 3 for longer trips. Boost this by another point for classy accommodations.

## Tools of Adventure: Equipment

### Fashions for Men

Up until about 1925, styles for men are pretty much what they were before the Great War. Daytime wear is a simple suit, usually gray or black, with a shirt in a basic color such as blue-gray, peach or putty. Ties generally have small geometric designs. The black bowler hat is standard headgear, although the felt fedora finds increasing popularity as fashions head into the 1930s. Patent



leather shoes become popular early in the '20s, in two-tone combinations such as white and tan for day wear, black for evening occasions. The tail coat and top hat are standard for evening dress, worn over a starched white shirt and pleated collar or bow tie. Laborers wear whatever's necessary for the job. Denim trousers and sturdy shirts, often worn with a tie, are standard, along with leather shoes or boots.

By 1925, baggy trousers (originated at Oxford for slipping on over trendy knickers frowned upon by the administration) become required wear for anyone with ambitions to seem current. Soft and flexible tweed catches on for coats and trousers and lends an ambience of gentility to this industrial age.

Working clothes are readily available for Resources 1. Standard office outfits require Resources 2, and staying current with fashion trends requires Resources 3 or above. London is the center of men's fashion until after World War II, with London design and London tailoring being the last word at any given moment.

### Fashions for Women

Women's fashions go in several different directions after the end of the Great War. For most women, the biggest change is the passing of the corset, replaced by undergarments allowing more freedom of movement. (It's all still horrifying by early 21st-century standards, but it is progress.) Working and at-home women favor modest, unrevealing styles but in a widen-

ing variety of natural and synthetic fabrics that allow more color and individualization.

For women with the money and interest, waistlines fall toward the hips, and in 1925, shift-style dresses without a waistline at all become fashionable. Dress and suit bodices begin the decade loose, even baggy, and become straighter and closer-fitting toward the '30s. Hemlines rise in 1928, at the same time Paris designers experiment with more fitted tailoring for suits, setting in motion a series of quick changes that continue up until the war slows fashion development. As with men, working women have little or nothing to do with anything fashionable. Denim, wool and flannel are all common in dresses and trousers, cut long and unrevealing.

Buttons are the universal fasteners until 1925-26, when zippers start winning widespread attention. Cotton and wool are the most common fabrics of the time. The upper classes favor silk, while the lower classes enthusiastically embrace rayon, marketed as "synthetic silk." Throughout the Adventure Era, Paris is the center for women's fashion innovation, New York for styles affordable by the masses.

A basic working wardrobe is available for Resources 1. The sheer variety of styles and the pace of change makes it harder for women to stay current than men. Reliable but unglamorous wardrobes fit the Resources 2 budget, but keeping oneself in the latest mode requires very careful management of Resources 3 and is much easier at Resources 4.





## Tools for Survival: Equipment

Basic first-aid supplies, including bandages, a knife, alcohol to sterilize it and the like, are available at Resources 1 and allow first-aid rolls without penalty. A typical doctor's kit, adding a die or more to medical rolls, costs Resources 2. These supplies are much more available in the '20s than in later decades, as the whole notion of restricting such goods to those with professional licenses (and indeed the idea of required licenses) is still new and by no means universal.

Cheap outdoors gear such as tents and portable stoves is almost certainly military surplus throughout the '20s. Owning recreational (or heavier-duty survival) equipment that is very clearly *not* military in origin reflects a certain status and enough wealth not to be concerned with good bargains. Keep in mind that there are very few gun-control laws except in a handful of metropolitan areas in the 1920s: Local authorities can ask what people are doing with exotic weaponry but can seldom interfere.

There is plenty more equipment to be found in the early 20th century. You're best served doing a quick search online or checking out an old Sears-Roebuck catalog to discover the sheer variety of items available.

## Fiendish Chemicals: Poisons and Drugs

Villains in pulp stories are constantly inflicting this chemical or that concoction on heroes, and heroes relax or experiment with a wide variety of exotic substances themselves. This section covers some of the major categories of mind- and body-altering substances.

Keep in mind that in the 1920s a great many things are legal that later decades will see banned. Public disparagement of the use of this drug or that is much more common — the notion of “honoring diversity” in lifestyle choices is a rare thing — but outright prohibition or even serious restrictions through licensing and the like is rare. The US effort to ban hard liquor is an expensive and highly visible failure and unrepresentative of public attitudes of the time. Most people in all social strata regard drug abuse as a moral failing to be addressed with persuasion and shame rather than as a crime to be punished by law.

In the following descriptions, “Vector” indicates the common means of getting the drug into a person. Ingested drugs are eaten, drunk and otherwise consumed; injected drugs are administered with a hypodermic or other needle; inhaled drugs are breathed in with the local air.

### Alcohol

**Description:** “Alcohol” encompasses everything from bootleg booze filled with toxic byproducts and random debris to the finest vintages of wine and champagne. Storytellers must apply a modicum of interpretation to specific cases.

**Vector:** Ingested

**Effect:** Alcohol is a disinhibitor — it removes some of the barriers to acting on impulses, which is why parties with a lot of drinking tend to get noisy. It also acts as

a mild sedative, which is why those parties eventually end in participants passing out.

A character using persuasion and other manipulation efforts on a drunk person receives +1 die if the target is mildly drunk, +2 or more dice if he is severely drunk. A mildly drunk subject suffers +1 difficulty penalty to efforts at fine manipulation and coordinated movement, rising to +2 or higher for more severe intoxication.

A player whose character has been drinking must make a Resistance roll to avoid having his character afflicted by a hangover, with +1 difficulty for weakly alcoholic beverages, +2 for strongly alcoholic ones or +3 for bootlegged drinks with little or no quality control.

**Antidote:** Water flushes alcohol out of the body, reducing penalties by –1 for every liter drunk; caffeine can offset fatigue effects as well.

### Amphetamines and Cocaine

**Description:** These are highly addictive stimulants, popular at all levels of society despite efforts to regulate or control them. No social stigma attaches to moderate use of them except in strongly puritanical communities, though abuse attracts criticism.

**Vector:** Inhaled or swallowed

**Effect:** These drugs make the user feel energetic and excited, boosting confidence and determination. Regular use gives the user +1 die to rolls involving concentration and heavy physical exertion, but the user must make a Resistance roll to avoid tremors and agitation strong enough to impose a +1 difficulty to fine manipulation efforts. A typical dose remains active for one to three hours and wears off to leave the user sluggish and at +2 difficulty to Stamina-related efforts for the next three to six hours.

Long-term consequences include heart problems, high blood pressure, even paranoia and loss of judgment.

**Antidote:** Depressants counteract stimulants, but mixing drugs this way is risky. Storytellers should feel free to apply all relevant penalties and work out other ramifications as suitable for the situation.

### Opium and Depressants

**Description:** These drugs relax the user. A lot. Some people find that they remove barriers to contemplation and artistic insight, which is why they're common among tormented visionaries. More mundane applications include the treatment of chronic insomnia.

**Vector:** Swallowed or injected

**Effect:** Depressants suppress pain, halving injury penalties (rounded down). They suppress everything else, too, leaving users at +2 difficulty to all dice pools while under the influence.

**Antidote:** See the note above under “Amphetamines and Cocaine”; it applies the other way around as well.

### Hallucinogens

**Description:** Pulp fiction abounds in exotic drugs that alter the victim's perceptions, ranging from mild



hallucinogenic effects such as fluctuating light levels through moderate ones such as heightening emotional states to severe ones such as terrifying monsters surrounding the victim.

**Vector:** Contact, inhaled or injected

**Effect:** Apply +1 to +3 difficulty to all dice pools. Customized drugs, ancient aboriginal secret chemicals and the like may also have targeted effects, affecting some categories of effort more severely. The mimosa gas favored by some Asian masterminds adds +3 difficulty to all dice pools, with an *additional* +2 difficulty for resisting commands and questioning by the individual who administered the drug, for instance. The red chameleon venom harvested in the Andes imposes +1 difficulty to all pools due to general disorientation in daylight, but at night, it unleashes vivid hallucinations and deep-seated terrors, inflicting +2 difficulty to Physical and Social dice pools and +3 difficulty to Mental dice pools. The Storyteller should feel free to add more such loathsome concoctions to suit the needs of a particular series.

Most hallucinogens last from one to six hours.

**Protection:** Rigid self-control and driving determination allow superior will to overcome some effects of these drugs. Inspired characters can spend one Inspiration and make a Willpower roll; every two successes (round down) removes one difficulty level of impairment. Characters lacking Inspiration (or those who choose not to spend it) can instead spend one Willpower and make a Willpower roll; it takes three successes to remove one difficulty level of impairment in this case.

## Nerve Gas

**Description:** Trench warfare fed rapid developments in chemical warfare. Once the war ended, both stockpiles and knowledge of how to make fresh batches spread into the public at large. Ruthless villains threaten and even actually use this sort of weapon on hapless civilian populations to make it clear how bad they are.

**Vector:** Contact or inhaled

**Effect:** At low levels of exposure, the victim automatically takes one lethal health level of damage per minute. At higher levels of exposure, this rises to one health level per *turn*. Nerve gas is disorienting, imposing +2 difficulty on the subject for the duration of exposure and for an hour afterward.

**Protection:** Nerve gas passes through the skin, but it is most effective when inhaled. Gas masks can keep damage down to one level per minute in high-exposure situations, but it takes a full-body suit to keep the gas out altogether.

**Antidote:** Antidotes provide relief only against momentary, low-level exposures.

## Tear Gas

**Description:** Tear gas is a favored weapon for military and police organizations that aim to subdue opponents rather than kill them.

**Vector:** Contact or inhaled

**Effect:** Severe eye irritation, coughing and gagging render victims more or less incapacitated. All dice pools suffer +3 difficulty for the duration of exposure and for 10 minutes afterward.

**Protection:** Gas masks and other breathing apparatus can block some or all of tear gas' effects.

## Timeline

### The New Century

**1900:** Republican William McKinley is reelected as President of the US. Maxwell Anderson Mercer celebrates his 11th birthday. Michael Daemon Donighal is born.

**1901:** Anarchist Leon Czolgosz shoots McKinley, who dies eight days later. Vice-President Theodore Roosevelt becomes President. Guglielmo Marconi transmits the Morse code for "S" from Cornwall to Newfoundland, inaugurating the radio age.

**1902:** Conservative Lord Arthur Balfour becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain. Safari Jack Tallon has his first heart attack in his early 60s and begins experimenting with exotic herb remedies to restore his health.

**1903:** Roosevelt sends the first two-way transatlantic wireless communication, from the Marconi transmitter in Massachusetts to King Edward VII in London. The US and Panama sign a treaty to build the Panama Canal. Orville Wright makes the first well-documented heavier-than-air flight at Kitty Hawk. Henry Ford founds the Ford Motor Company.

**1904:** Republican Theodore Roosevelt wins the US Presidency, defeating Democrat Alton Parker in the largest margin up to that time.

**1905:** Russian sailors mutiny onboard the battleship *Potemkin*, in a precursor to the Russian Revolution. Liberal Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain. The *Annum Mirabilis*, five papers written by Einstein, published, changing the world.

**1906:** Roosevelt wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in ending the Russo-Japanese war and is the first President to step on foreign soil while in office, visiting the dig in Panama. The Transvaal and the Orange Free State granted self-rule by the British.

**1907:** Oklahoma becomes the 46th state of the US. The United Press Association is founded in New York City.

**1908:** Ford introduces the Model T automobile. Republican William Howard Taft is elected President of the US. Liberal Earl Herbert Henry Asquith becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain.

**1909:** The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is founded. Admiral Robert Edwin Peary plants the US flag at the North Pole.

**1910:** The Boy Scouts of America is founded. King Edward VII dies; George V becomes King of Great Britain.



**1911:** The British Parliament passes the National Insurance Act, its first measure for universal health care.

**1912:** Democrat Woodrow Wilson defeats Republican Taft and Progressive Theodore Roosevelt to become President of the US. New Mexico becomes the 47th state, Arizona the 48th. The Girl Scouts of the United States of America is chartered. The Cadillac division of General Motors introduces the first battery-powered ignition. The *Titanic* sinks. Sandra Bernhardt plays the title role in *Queen Elizabeth*, a French four-reel, 60-minute feature film.

**1913:** The XVth Amendment allows national income taxes.

**1914:** Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip shoots Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary, and cascading treaty obligations trigger the Great War (later known as World War I). American troops occupy Vera Cruz, Mexico, until Mexican President Victoriano Huerta resigns.

**1915:** The first transatlantic transmission of the human voice takes place between Arlington, Virginia, and the Eiffel Tower. Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Watson reenact their 1876 phone call, with Bell in New York and Watson in San Francisco, in the first transcontinental telephone call.

**1916:** Democrat Woodrow Wilson narrowly wins reelection to the US Presidency against Republican Charles Evans Hughes. Pancho Villa leads Mexican bandits on a raid across the border into the US and escapes a year's worth of pursuit by American troops. Liberal Earl David Lloyd George becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain.

**1917:** The US enters the Great War. Puerto Ricans become US citizens. Montana elects Jeanette Rankin as the first female member of the US House of Representatives. Lord Balfour, former Prime Minister, commits the British government to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Ivan Boris Vladimirovich Staynskaya flees the Bolshevik Revolution, Princess Anastasia in tow. Jake Stefokowski lies about his age to enlist as a member of the Lafayette Escadrille; he is one of the first air aces at the tender age of 12.

**1918:** The Great War ends with German surrender. Mercer journeys to India and rescues Whitley Styles from the hands of the Thuggee.

**1919:** The Treaty of Versailles formally ends the war (and unwittingly lays the foundations for World War II). Congress passes the XVIII Amendment over Wilson's veto, inaugurating the era of prohibition.

## Modern Times

**1920:** Republican Warren Harding beats Democratic James Cox to become President of the US. The League of Nations meets for the first time, in Paris, while the US refuses to join. US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer makes many warrantless raids on suspected Communists and anarchists. The first transcontinental airmail service goes into operation. J.T. Thompson patents his

portable machine gun, soon nicknamed the Tommy gun. Mohandas Gandhi inaugurates his campaign of nonviolent protest against British rule of India.

**1921:** KDKA broadcasts the first religious service; radio evangelism soon becomes one of the most popular uses of radio. Britain grants dominion status and home rule to the Irish Free State. Scalper Dutch celebrates his 75th birthday by massacring the posse surrounding his hideout.

**1922:** Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter discover Tutankhamon's tomb. The British Broadcasting Corporation makes its first transmissions. Benito Mussolini becomes dictator of Italy. Lenin proclaims the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, formalizing Bolshevik rule in Russia, Byelorussia, the Ukraine and Transcaucasia. Publication of Claude McKay's poetry collection, *Harlem Shadows*, kicks the Harlem Renaissance into high gear. Mah jongg becomes a national craze in the US. Conservative Andrew Bonar Law becomes the first Prime Minister of Great Britain of colonial origin but resigns for health reasons a year later. Doctor Sir Calvin Hammersmith unleashes the most tragic lab accident of all time. P.A.M. Dirac postulates zero-point energy in the wake of Hammersmith's experiment (this doesn't occur until 1930 in the real world and isn't even labeled as such until much later).

**1923:** President Harding dies of food poisoning; Vice-President Calvin Coolidge takes the Presidency. *Time* magazine begins weekly publication. The Teapot Dome scandal implicates high-ranking officials in fraud involving oil and coal leases. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk begins brutally modernizing Turkey. Yankee Stadium opens in New York City. The last US troops return from Europe. Maxwell Anderson Mercer formally founds the *Æon* Society for Gentlemen.

**1924:** *Right now!* Richard Simon and Max Schuster found Plaza Publishing (later renamed Simon and Schuster) to publish the first crossword puzzle books. Ku Klux Klan membership peaks at between 2 to 5 million and goes into decline. Lenin dies; Stalin out-manuevers Trotsky to become the new head of the USSR. Douglas Fairbanks stars in *The Thief of Bagdad* and becomes a worldwide star. The British Empire Exposition opens with the first broadcast of a British monarch's voice. J. Edgar Hoover takes charge of the Bureau of Investigation (renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935) and embarks on ambitious reforms after a series of major scandals. RCA transmits the first wireless telegraph pictures from London to New York. The Ford Motor company produces its 10 millionth car. The Leica Corporation, based in Germany, produces the first mass-produced cameras. Labour candidate James Ramsey MacDonald becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain in a government that lasts only from January to October. Conservative Lord Stanley Baldwin replaces him in October.



## The Day After Tomorrow

**1925:** The dirigible *Shenandoah* breaks apart in a storm over Ohio, seriously damping enthusiasm for expansion of commercial lighter-than-air travel. Nellie Ross of Wyoming and Miriam "Ma" Ferguson of Texas take office as the US' first female governors. *The New Yorker* magazine begins publication. John T. Scopes is convicted of teaching evolution in Tennessee, though the case is overturned on appeal to the Tennessee Supreme Court in 1927. Charles Francis Jenkins makes the first public demonstration of broadcast television in Washington, DC. The first Art Deco fair opens in Paris.

**1926:** Robert Goddard launches the first liquid fuel rocket. A general strike begins in Britain. Hirohito becomes emperor of Japan. Lufthansa Airlines begin regular service in and around Germany. Michelson and Morley announce a very accurate measurement of the speed of light (already measured somewhat less precisely in the 1800s).

**1927:** Transatlantic telephone service begins between New York and London. Mt. Rushmore is completed and dedicated. Charles Lindbergh flies nonstop from New York to Paris. The German stock market collapses on May 13, "Black Friday," inaugurating lasting economic troubles. British inventor John Logie Baird records video signals as electrical impulses on a wax disc, but does not achieve commercial success. Ford Motor Company begins selling the Model A automobile. Heisenberg publishes his uncertainty principle, solidifying the growing view that modern physics was getting less and less clockwork-like. Mao Zedong and other Chinese Communist leaders break with the Chinese government to begin civil war.

**1928:** The Daven Corporation sells the first consumer television sets in the US. Sixty-five nations sign the Kellogg-Briand Pact, renouncing war forever. (They don't stick to it.) Joseph Stalin announces the first Five-Year Plan. Republican Herbert Hoover defeats Democrat Alfred E. Smith to become President of the US. Mickey Mouse debuts in "Steamboat Willy."

**1929:** Hans Berger develops the electroencephalograph. Labour politician James Ramsey MacDonald becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain for the second time. Black Thursday: The US stock market collapses precipitously, and by the end of the year, the Great Depression is underway.

**1930:** New York Supreme Court Justice Joseph Carter disappears mysteriously in New York City. Astronomer C. W. Tombaugh of Lowell Observatory discovers Pluto. Sinclair Lewis is the first American to win the Nobel Prize for literature. Chrysler Building completed. Construction begins on the Empire State Building. Ho Chi Minh founds the Vietnamese Communist Party, later renamed the Indochinese Communist Party. The last Allied soldiers (French and Belgian) withdraw from Germany.

**1931:** Karl Jansky at Bell Telephone Laboratories discovers emissions from the center of the Milky Way, inaugurating the science of radio astronomy. The Ford Motor Company produces its 20 millionth car. The Empire State Building is completed.

**1932:** Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt easily defeats Republican Herbert Hoover to become President of the US. The neutron is discovered, leading to the atomic age.

**1933:** Congress repeals prohibition.

**1934:** The Federal Communications Commission begins regulating radio station frequencies.

**1935:** Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act. Conservative Earl Stanley Baldwin becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain for the third time.

**1937:** The Golden Gate Bridge is completed. Amelia Earhart and her co-pilot Fred Noonan disappear over the Pacific. The zeppelin *Hindenburg* explodes over Lakehurst, New Jersey; Herb Morrison's emotion-laden coverage makes the disaster seem much worse than it actually is. Conservative Neville Chamberlain becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain, his term dominated by concession and capitulation to growing Nazi aggression.

**1938:** Howard Hughes and his team fly around the world in 91 hours.

**1939:** Filthy Nazi rats unleash World War II. The New York and San Francisco World's Fairs present determinedly optimistic, technocratic views of the future. The first transatlantic airline passenger service opens, between Long Island and Lisbon.

**1940:** Roosevelt defeats Republican Wendell Willkie to win reelection. Conservative Sir Winston Churchill becomes Prime Minister of Great Britain in a coalition of parties that lasts until the end of World War II.

**1941:** Japan attacks Pearl Harbor; the US joins World War II on the Allied side.

**1942:** Bell Aircraft creates the XP-59A, the first known American jet aircraft. Mercer's inaugural jump through time after the Hammersmith event lands him here, where he is met by his older self and certain key members of the Æon Society.

**1943:** The Æon Society battles Doctor Primoris, who vanishes mysteriously in the conflict's climax. Mercer claims to be content with the resolution but grows more reclusive in the coming years.

**1944:** Roosevelt defeats Republican Thomas Dewey to win reelection.

**1945:** Roosevelt dies of a brain hemorrhage; Vice-President Harry Truman becomes President. World War II ends with German and Japanese surrender. A young man going by the name of Michael Mercer and claiming to be Maxwell Mercer's son (but keeping mum about the identity of his mother) appears on the steps of the Æon Society's Chicago brownstone; only Mercer is not surprised.



## Yet To Come

**1946:** The Moore School of Electrical Engineering in Philadelphia builds ENIAC, the first known digital computer (30' x 60' and weighing 60,000 pounds). The League of Nations disbands and assigns its assets to the United Nations; John D. Rockefeller, Jr., donates the money to purchase Manhattan property for the UN's new headquarters.

**1947:** Private pilot Kenneth Arnold spots unidentified flying objects over Mt. Rainier in Washington state, inaugurating the ongoing public fascination with UFOs. Commercial television broadcasters multiply as wartime restrictions on raw materials end.

**1948:** Democrat Harry Truman defeats Republican Thomas Dewey to become President of the US in his own right.

**1950:** Maxwell Anderson Mercer vanishes from public life. Even his associates in *Aeon* appear to be at a loss as to his whereabouts. Michael Maxwell Mercer, his son, observes that Mercer will return "when he is needed."

**1998:** Dawn of the Nova Age. Divis Mal makes his next play to be the most important person in the world.

**2106:** Dawn of the Trinity Era.

## Glossary

- **Ability:** A *Trait* describing learning, knowledge or applied experience in a given area. Abilities are added to *Attributes* to determine your *character's dice pool* when performing *actions*.

- **Ability mastery:** Peerless command of a given field.

- **action:** Performing a task (a consciously willed activity). When you announce that your *character* is doing something, he's taking an action. This is also called a *dice action* when you must roll dice (known as a *dice pool*) to determine whether or not your character succeeds in the attempt. Actions are subject to certain variables; see below.

- **action, additional:** A full extra *action* in addition to the *character's* normal one that takes place in the same turn. Distinct from a *multiple action*, below.

- **action, difficult:** A task more challenging than normal. See *difficulty*.

- **action, extended:** A task that takes more than one turn to complete.

- **action, multiple:** Splitting a *character's* single *action* in a turn into more than one task. This reduces the first "sub-action's" *dice pool* by a number of dice equal to the total number of multiple actions your character takes that turn. Each following action loses an additional die (cumulative).

- **action, reflexive:** A *dice action* called for by the *Storyteller* that occurs in response to some brief outside stimulus. It is not significant enough to be designated a physical action by the *character* within the game.

- **action, resisted:** An *action* that two or more *characters* take against one another. The *Storyteller* designates which *Traits* are rolled, the winner being the *character* with the most *successes*.

- **action, standard:** An *action* with no *difficulty* modifiers. You simply roll your *dice pool* and tally any *successes*. All tasks a *character* performs are standard actions unless the *Storyteller* declares otherwise (by applying a *difficulty*, noting *multiple actions*, calling a *reflexive action* or stating that the action is resisted).

- **Advancement:** An *invention* that dramatically improves existing technology.

- **adventurer:** A *player's character*. Also *hero*, *inspired character*.

- **allegiance:** The club, government, cult or other organization to which your character retains great loyalty.

- **Attribute:** A *Trait* that describes your character's basic characteristics; a reflection of raw, natural capability.

- **Background:** A *Trait* that indicates your character's level of social involvement, from friends to influence to wealth and more.

- **Background enhancement:** A *Trait* describing stupendous status in a certain area of social involvement, head and shoulders above a standard *Background*.

- **botch:** A notable and often dramatic failure when attempting an *action*.

- **character:** The persona that you, the *player*, take on in an *Adventure* game.

- **character, Storyteller:** Any *character* the *Storyteller* handles with whom the *players' characters* interact, from an incidental bystander to a key villain. See also *extra*.

- **cliffhanger:** A climactic end to a game session, where the characters' fate is in doubt.

- **compound:** A chemically created *invention*.

- **daredevil:** A "non-powered" *adventurer* who relies on his wits and incredible luck to triumph.

- **device:** A mechanically constructed *invention*.

- **dice pool:** The total number of dice available to you for a given *action*, determined from the combined *rating* of an *Ability* and its base *Attribute*. If a *character* doesn't have an *Ability rating* in a task, default to the base *Attribute* as the dice pool. Certain dice pools are based on a single *Trait* (*Willpower*, *Inspiration*, etc).

- **difficulty:** Short for the "difficulty of the roll," a *difficulty* notes the added challenge involved in accomplishing a task. You must roll the standard base of one *success* plus the additional *difficulty* indicated (usually by the *Storyteller*) to accomplish a *difficult action*.

- **dots:** The method used to indicate *Trait rating* values. Each dot equals a die that may be used to perform *actions*.

- **downtime:** Time glossed over with description rather than played out in detail.

- **dramatic editing:** The ability to alter the existing scene by spending *Inspiration*.

- **extra:** A *Storyteller character* with whom the *team* interacts. An *extra* is normally a minor figure on the scene — a passerby, a snitch, a hired gun — who adds to the story but is not meant to be a major force for or against the *players' characters*.



- **facet:** An expression of *Inspiration*, divided into three parts: Intuitive, Reflective and Destructive.
- **group:** The term applied to the *players* who adopt the personas of *characters* involved in the game.
- **Innovation:** An *invention* based upon theoretical science.
- **Inspiration:** The special *Trait* for **Adventure** *characters*; what *characters* spend when doing superhuman feats.
- **invention:** An amazing creation beyond the technology of the time, developed through *super-science*. Divided into *Advancements* and *Innovations*.
- **Knack:** A special thing an *Inspired character* can do. Dynamic Knacks draw upon *telluric energy* to manipulate the basic structures of spacetime to perform feats of physical prowess and the like. Psychic Knacks use telluric energy to manipulate information, allowing for mental and (as far as this era is concerned) mystical powers. Heroic Knacks do not draw on telluric energy; instead, they are instances of incredible luck and skill beyond the grasp of regular folks.
- **mesmerist:** An *adventurer* who uses mental (psychic) powers.
- **Nature:** Your character's core being, his emotional personality, split into a positive *Virtue* and a negative *Vice*.
- **organism:** A living (grown or surgically modified) *invention*.
- **player:** That's you!
- **points, bonus:** Fifteen points you receive during character generation to increase your *character's* existing *Trait ratings* or to buy new ones.
- **points, experience:** Points awarded by the *Storyteller* as "reward" for achieving the story's objective or playing a *character* well. Experience points can be spent to add new *Traits* or raise existing ones.
- **points, transformation:** Thirteen points you receive during character generation used to give your *character* the capabilities that change him from an average citizen of the world into a *hero*.
- **quality:** A remarkable aspect of one or more of your *character's* *Attributes*.
- **rating:** An indication of a *character's* level of accomplishment in a given *Trait*. Usually a 0 to 5 range, though sometimes from 0 to 10 (often noted in numbers of *dots*). Also *score*.
- **scene:** A compact period of events that occurs in a single location, like the basic division in movies.
- **soak:** A character's ability to withstand damage and physical trauma.
- **specialty:** An area of expertise within an *Ability*.
- **stalwart:** An *adventurer* who has physically based (dynamic) powers.
- **Storyteller:** The person who creates and guides the game by assuming the roles of all *characters* not taken

by the *players*, and the person who determines all events beyond the *players'* control.

- **success:** A die that rolls equal to or higher than the *target number* of 7. Most *actions* require only one success; more challenging actions demand more successes.
- **success, extra:** Any success you roll beyond the minimum required to accomplish an *action*. Extra successes may be used to make a standard success truly remarkable.
- **super-science:** The study of science an *Inspired character* pursues beyond the normal scope of the era.
- **target number:** The standard *rating* of 7 over which you must roll for your *character* to succeed in a *dice action*.
- **team:** Specifically refers to the *characters* within the game, not the individuals playing them.
- **telluric energy:** A collective term for extra-terrestrial (zero-point) energy. Also *telluric waves* or *radiation*; *Z-waves*.
- **Trait:** Any *Attribute*, *Ability*, *Advantage* or other index with a *rating*.
- **turn:** A unit of "game time," representing three seconds in combat and a few minutes in calmer circumstances.
- **Vice:** The negative side of a *character's* *Nature*.
- **Virtue:** The positive aspect of a *character's* *Nature*.
- **Willpower:** A *Trait* indicating a *character's* self-confidence and moral center.
- **zero-point energy (Z-waves):** Force extracted from the innate energy in empty spacetime; a collective term for the power that *mesmerists* and *stalwarts* draw upon. Also called *telluric energy*.

## Fictional Characters and Organizations

- **The Æon Society for Gentlemen:** Maxwell Mercer's alliance of heroes and do-gooders. The default, but by no means only, group to which *players'* *characters* belong. One of the greatest champions of exploration and discovery of Earth and the human condition.
- **The Air Circus:** A loose brotherhood of daring pilots and barnstormers.
- **Baron Halcyon:** Initially a character in some entertaining tales by the writer Hammond Banes, the Hammersmith event somehow transformed Banes into his creation! Halcyon has become the ruler of an albino people who populate an extensive civilization below the Earth's surface.
- **Branch 7:** A covert international, though independently operating, spy network whose members investigate matters from the national to the individual.
- **Ernest Warren Caldwell:** A former US Senator, Caldwell leads the Manifest Destiny Infantry in a mad attempt to further expand the boundaries of the United States across the world.
- **The Contedorri:** An independent organization that hooks up the perfect criminal with the perfect crime. The King of the World and the Ubiquitous Dragon are among its best clients.



- **The Cult of the Sun-Disk:** A fanatical group that worships the abstract Egyptian deity Aton, the embodiment of the sun. Their goal is to bring about the reincarnation of Akhenaton and Nefertiti.

- **Lady Argentine de Winter:** A woman of breeding and respectability in polite society, Lady de Winter is secretly the King of the World, a master criminal who rivals the Ubiquitous Dragon for control of the underworld.

- **Professor Benjamin Franklin Dixon:** A founding member of the Æon Society, Dixon is one of the most brilliant inventors of the day and enjoys a legendary love-hate relationship with his ex-wife, Hephaestia Geary-Wexler.

- **Michael Donighal:** Also Doctor Primoris, later Divis Mal. The archetypal foil to Mercer, Dr. Doom to Mercer's Reed Richards. A complex and, in some ways, tragic character.

- **Gar:** A champion of the albino E'tah who dwell beneath the Earth, Gar opposes Baron Halcyon and his usurpation of the underworld.

- **Hephaestia Geary-Wexler:** Sometimes called the "Machinatrix," Geary-Wexler is as brilliant as her ex-husband, Franklin Dixon (a fact that infuriates and excites him to no end).

- **Sarah Gettel:** An investigative reporter with a nose for trouble, Gettel uncovers many sources of weirdness that pop up after the Hammersmith event.

- **Doctor Sir Calvin Hammersmith:** The inventor whose Telluric Engine explodes to unleash the energy that grants Inspiration to **Adventure** characters.

- **Jackson Harley:** Better known as Mister Saturday, Harley is a reputed master of voodoo and plays the role of benevolent dictator over his fellow Haitians.

- **The Inquiry:** A shadowy group bent on ending war and punishing those who profit from it.

- **International Detective Agency (IDA):** An international criminal investigation group and society of crime-busters.

- **Maxwell Anderson Mercer:** Philanthropist, scholar, hero, doer of good deeds. A shining example of what the good guys are like. Also (unbeknownst to anyone but a few trusted associates) capable of traveling through time.

- **Emma Nazir:** Unknown even to herself, Nazir has become Neferneferaten-Nefertiti, the "reincarnation" of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti and worshiper of the heretical sun-deity Aton.

- **Annabelle Lee Newfield:** Natural talented with all weapons, Annabelle battles fearlessly on behalf of the Æon Society. Her unrequited love for Doctor Primoris drives Newfield to betray the Society and serves as the catalyst for Primoris' own enmity with Mercer and his crew.

- **Ocelotl:** The rumored "Jaguar Queen" of South America, this mysterious woman jealously protects her jungle lair from the encroachment of civilization.

- **The Order of Murder:** A British secret society that fakes the deaths of those with the means to afford it, setting up the individuals in new lives.

- **The Ponatowski Foundation:** On the surface, a philanthropic organization charged with funding explorations to the four corners of the Earth. In secret, the foundation is manipulated by corrupt individuals including the likes of the Czar, Uriah Stafford, the King of the World and more.

- **The Rational Experimentation Group (REG):** A front in an alliance between the Machinatrix, the Ubiquitous Dragon and Mister Saturday, the REG engages in bizarre experiments and unusual crimes relating to medical research.

- **Le Salon des Femmes Nouveaux:** An organization dedicated to liberating women from male oppression by any means necessary.

- **Scalper Dutch:** One of the best, meanest and, at this point, oldest gunslingers who ever lived. Some think he died years ago but is just too damn stubborn to fall down.

- **Uriah Stafford:** Head of Styles & Stafford Imports, a British import firm (also involved in a number of shady endeavors). Partner with Whitley Styles' father before the elder Styles' death.

- **Ivan Boris Vladimir Staynskaya:** The self-styled Czar is an aristocrat who fled the Bolshevik Revolution with the young Princess Anastasia. Staynskaya dreams of one day returning to Mother Russia as its ruler, with Anastasia as his wife.

- **Jake Stefokowski:** Also known as the "Danger Ace," Jake is a founding member of the Æon Society and one of the best pilots ever to take to the air.

- **Whitley Styles:** Kato to Mercer's Green Hornet, Watson to Mercer's Holmes, Styles is the quintessential sidekick. A trained assassin with a heart of gold, he plays the role of the common man in contrast to Max Mercer's enlightened social scientist.

- **Safari Jack Tallon:** A painfully British explorer whose exploits in the Victorian Age became fodder for dime novels and inspired the likes of Max Mercer. Later, a founding member of Æon and mentor to Danger Ace.

- **Imam Khwarazmi ibn Abi Tirmidhi:** A Muslim holy man driven to extremes in the aftermath of Hammersmith's failed experiment. Known to the Western world as the Turk, he directs his fanatics against those who threaten to corrupt the ways of Islam.

- **The Ubiquitous Dragon:** Next to Doctor Primoris, the Æon Society's greatest foe. A master schemer and intellect, the Dragon threatens to dominate the world through his subtle machinations.

- **Doctor Manfred von Zorbo:** A brilliant German inventor who's perhaps a bit off-plumb mentally, Zorbo envisions a world where humanity dwells in the sky aboard floating cities of his design. He's pretty militant about making it happen, too.



# Inspirations and Resources

## Film and Television

Pulp adventure is a matter of atmosphere and attitude at least as much as it is of facts. Look isn't everything, but it's very important. **Adventure** works best when players and Storytellers agree on the style they have in mind, since it's a lot easier to improvise from shared expectations.

- **Original serials** — A growing number of '20s and '30s film serials are available on videotape and DVD. It's hard to do some of them justice: You have to see singing cowboys and evil robots on screen together for yourself. Availability varies wildly, so check around. (The Websites listed below include helpful pointers to places that might be glad to sell to you.)

- **Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)** — It would be silly to compile a list of pulp influences and not mention this movie. It's set a full decade and some after **Adventure's** primary era, but so what? This film is still one of the archetypal stories of two-fisted science, courage in the face of hubris-consumed evil and supernatural power. A series that can capture the rhythm of drama and comedy, action and character that *Raiders* offers should be a spectacular success.

- **The Mummy (1999)** — You can do this with **Adventure!** Really! Review the antagonists on page 235 and the scientific explanation on page 216 if you doubt it. Then sit back and enjoy this tale of ancient curses and modern ambitions with a clear conscience. Take inspiration from the stunts and note that even the lout of a brother gets in some fast thinking.

- **The Phantom (1976)** — If you want heroes in masks, see this movie. See it anyway because, with the skull cave hideouts, all-lady air pirates and delightfully self-satisfied mad villains, there's something for almost every **Adventure** series here. Billy Zane's portrayal of the Phantom also bears watching for its complete absence of both angst and irony. He isn't parodying the part, he's just showing us a very driven, yet happy, hero.

- **The Rocketeer (1991)** — This movie is less epic than some of the other films (though the prospect of Nazi armies equipped with rocket packs is pretty drastic) and focuses on heroic technology and local adventure. It makes great use of clichés about famous places — Hollywood, in particular — and shows some ways of integrating real people into adventure yarns. Storytellers take note of the conflicting aims of the various villains, too.

- **The Shadow (1994)** — Every **Adventure** game should look this spiffy when the powers go into action. The Shadow has one of the all-time great hideouts and demonstrates a variety of Background enhancements along the way. The combination of magic and high-technology is just as suitable for **Adventure** here as it is in *The Mummy*, too.

## Comic Books

- **Classic newspaper strips** — Many pulp heroes first appeared in newspaper comic strips: the Phantom, Mandrake the Magician, Flash Gordon and the like. In recent years, there've been great reprints of many of these strips from publishers such as Fantagraphics and Kitchen Sink Press. Check your library and used bookstore.

- **Hellboy** — Mike Mignola's title character is a demon sent to Earth as part of an elaborate scheme to end the world... but he's not having it. He's chosen his own destiny. Hellboy and his associates investigate weird phenomena of all kinds. Mignola's beautifully detailed artwork conjures up vivid, strange environments, and his writing includes a lot of really first-rate pulp-tradition dialogue. If you want a more supernatural style of series than stock **Adventure** provides, check this out.

- **Planetary** — Written by Warren Ellis and illustrated by John Cassaday, this series has it all. The title organization investigates weird occurrence of all sorts, and each story makes use of visual and design motifs of different genres. The series' overall construction is worth studying, too, with short, self-contained stories that add up to a much greater whole. You could do worse than to heavily flavor the *Æon Society* or some other heroic organization with the *Planetary* style.

- **Sandman Mystery Theatre** — Writers Matt Wagner and Steve Seagle and artist Guy Davis brought the darker side of the between-wars era to life in this series of street-level action. It's loaded with intrigue and tight, deep characterization. A lot of it's now available in trade paperbacks, and even if you don't want to run a series in this style, look at it for the meticulously rendered environments. Davis gets the clothes, the vehicles and a whole lot else right.

- **Tom Strong** — Writer Alan Moore and artists Gary Gianni and Chris Sprouse throw caution to the winds in this series of profoundly epic, gonzo adventure. If you want to bring **Aberrant**-level characters into a pulp milieu, you should check this out.

## Prose and Poetry

You'll find a lot of benefit in Time-Life historical series and other picture-heavy books about the era and places in your series. And don't forget the children's section of your local library, since some of the best non-academic historical writing of our time is aimed at children. If you want to use airships a lot, grab a couple of books about zeppelins to admire the pictures and steal the vignettes; if you want to run a series set in the Himalayas, do the same with books about mountaineering; and so on. It shouldn't feel like drudge work: get a few books that make you say "That's neat!" or "I must use that!" and don't worry about the boring parts.

- **Period series** — There's a wealth of material we can't cover here directly. Stores now carry facsimiles and



reprints of classic series such as the Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew and Tom Swift, all of which were very different in their original incarnations than in later revivals and efforts at updating.

- **The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life From Prohibition Through World War II** — Written by Marc McCutcheon. It's hard to overstate the usefulness of this book. Prices for everyday (and exotic) items, how tariffs were applied, crime and punishment, diet and clothing, a handy list of period slang terms — it's all here somewhere. There are fine roleplaying game supplements that cover some of this same ground, but McCutcheon offers more breadth and depth.

- **The Complete Works of Charles Fort** — Edited by Charles Fort. Fort collected anomalous news stories — what he called "damned facts" because they were unacceptable to the scientific establishment — and they're all in this thick book. Truth is stranger than fiction, and there's stuff in "Wild Talents" and "The Book of the Damned" that will make any group of players scratch their heads. An excellent omnibus edition is available from Dover Publications.

- **Being Red** — Written by Howard Fast. Novelist Fast writes a very readable, very moving memoir of life in New York's slums in the '20s and '30s, what it was like to be a struggling artist in the depths of the Great Depression and his experiences with the Communist Party.

- **A History of the Twentieth Century** — Written by Martin Gilbert. There are many good histories of the era. This one has some advantages: It's recent and can therefore draw on recent discoveries and interpretations, it's organized chronologically for easy browsing (and well-indexed), and it gives more attention to the world beyond Europe and America than many histories written for the general public do. Gilbert has a knack for finding the perfect anecdote to illuminate a situation and an ongoing interest in how people outside the halls of power dealt with a changing world.

- **The Mafia Encyclopedia** — Edited by Carl Sifakis. A one stop shopping reference for everything mob related, from Meyer Lansky to Vincent "the Chin" Gigante.

- **Timetables of History** — Published by Random House, this book traces important events from 4000 BC to 1993 in an easy to reference format (it's damn interesting, too!).

- **Going Home Again** — Written by Howard Waldrop. Waldrop mostly writes alternate histories; the title story in this collection, for instance, has novelist Thomas Wolfe sailing home from the 1940 Olympics with Fats Waller and others in a world where World War II isn't going to happen. The opening few pages, which reveal the nature of the sailing one detail at a time, are the sort of thing a good Storyteller can strip-mine for inspiration. Waldrop is unique and well worth checking out. You'll probably have to go a library for his earlier volumes, such as **Night of the Cooters** and its story of Martian invasion in turn-of-the-century Texas.

## Music

- **Movie soundtracks** — Virtually every movie mentioned above has a soundtrack you can buy. Some have vintage music, others modern scores, but they all capture the mood of just about any **Adventure** scene you can think of.

- **Ken Burns JAZZ: The Story of America's Music** — Ken Burns. A great collection of, well, jazz.

- **Night and Day** — Chicago. Yup, that classic-rock band performing old-style tunes.

## Online

Websites change their addresses just when one least expects it, so if you have any problems with these URLs, use your favorite search engine and look for the site name, which often remains constant while the underlying address moves.

- **ThePulp.Net**, <http://www.thepulp.net/> — This site is just an amazing resource, with a lot of content right there and links to everywhere. Go here to find the text of whole stories and novels, artwork, interviews and much more. **Adventure** is a much stronger game thanks to this resource.

- **The Vintage Library**, <http://www.vintagelibrary.com/pulp/index.cfm> — These folks will sell you print and electronic copies of famous and obscure pulps alike. You can get a whole lot just by browsing their preview pages and admiring the artwork.

- **The Smithsonian Institution**, <http://www.si.edu/> — A site for one of the greatest repositories of information in the world. This site is an example of just one of many places you can look for authentic details on the early 20th century.





# Credits

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## Special Thanks

To White Wolf, for giving us the chance to show everyone where it all started.

— Andrew Bates



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This book uses the early 20th century for settings, characters and themes. All criminal, political and mystical elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

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PRINTED IN CANADA



# ADVENTURE!

TALES OF  
THE A&ON  
SOCIETY

Gender:  
Nationality:  
Allegiance:  
Nature:

Name:  
Player:  
Series:  
Experience:  
Vice:  
Inspiration:

Virtue:

## ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

### Physical

### Mental

### Social

#### STRENGTH

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Archery \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Brawl \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Might \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

#### PERCEPTION

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Awareness \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Investigation \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Navigation \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

#### APPEARANCE

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Disguise \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Intimidation \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Style \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

#### DEXTERITY

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Athletics \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Firearms \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Legerdemain \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Martial Arts \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Melee \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Stealth \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
\_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

#### INTELLIGENCE

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Academics \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Bureaucracy \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Engineering \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Linguistics \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Medicine \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Science \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Survival \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

#### MANIPULATION

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Animal Handling \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Interrogation \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Savvy \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Subterfuge \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
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#### STAMINA

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Endurance \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Resistance \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
\_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
\_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

#### WITS

00000

Arts \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Drive \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Pilot \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
\_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

#### CHARISMA

00000

Command \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Etiquette \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Perform \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐  
Rapport \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0 ☐

## ADVANTAGES

### Backgrounds

Allies \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Backing \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Cipher \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Contacts \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Followers \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Gadget \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Influence \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Menagerie \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Mentor \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Nemesis \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Reputation \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Resources \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0  
Sanctum \_\_\_\_\_ 00000 0

### Knacks

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## WILLPOWER

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□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Intuitive Facet ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Reflective Facet ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Destructive Facet ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

## HEALTH

### Soak

| Armor         | Rating (B/L) | Penalty                     |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| None          | ___ / 0      | 0                           |
| _____         | ___ / ___    | ___                         |
| _____         | ___ / ___    | ___                         |
| Total:        | ___ / ___    | ___                         |
| Bruised       |              | -0 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hurt          |              | -1 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Injured       |              | -1 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Wounded       |              | -2 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maimed        |              | -3 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Crippled      |              | -4 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Incapacitated |              | <input type="checkbox"/>    |

## INSPIRATION

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□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □



# ADVENTURE!

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